

BOTHWELL, VOLUME I

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BOTHWELL:
OR,
THE DAYS OF MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS.

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"THE ROMANCE OF WAR," "MEMORIALS OF EDINBURGH CASTLE,"

"THE SCOTTISH CAVALIER," &c., &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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PREFACE.

The leading event upon which the following story hinges, will be found in the illustrative notes at the end of the third volume, which will show that the Magister Absalom (so frequently referred to) was a real personage, who, in the days of Earl Bothwell, was a Protestant clergyman at Bergen, and author of a Diary named *The Chapter Book*.

There is no style of reading more conducive to a good or evil result, than the historical romance, according to the manner it is treated, by a judicious or injudicious writer. I have been studious in avoiding any distortion of history, the tenor of which is so often misconstrued wilfully by writers of romance; for there are bounds beyond which not even they are entitled to go. The Scottish reader will find how closely I have woven up the stirring events of 1567 with my

own story, which, in reality, contains much more that is veracious than fictitious.

Thus, Bothwell's journey to Denmark—his conflict with John of Park—the Queen's visit to Hermitage—the assault on the house of Alison Craig—the brawl and assistance given the Earl (in mistake for Arran) by the Abbot of Kilwinning—and many other incidents, all occurred actually as related.

With one or two exceptions, every character in the following pages was a *bona fide* personage "of flesh and blood," who existed at the time, and was an actor in the scenes narrated.

In the general grouping, costume, and other dramatic accessories, I have endeavoured (as closely as I could) to draw a picture of the Scottish court and metropolis in the year 1567, at a time when the splendour of both was dimmed by the poverty which followed the wars and tumults of the Reformation; and with what success, I may say with the old knights of Cumbernauld—"Let the deed shaw!"

EDINBURGH, *September*, 1851.

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BOTHWELL;
OR,
THE DAYS OF MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS.

CHAPTER I.
THE CASTLE OF BERGEN.

The stern old shepherd of the air,

The spirit of the whistling hair,
 The wind has risen drearily
 In the northern evening sea,
 And is piping long and loud
 From many a heavy up-coming cloud.
Leigh Hunt.

It was the autumn of a bleak day in the September of 1566.

Enveloped in murky clouds, through which, at times, its red rays shot along the crested waves, the Norwegian sun was verging to the westward. From the frozen Baltic a cold wind swept down the Skager Rack, and, urged by the whole force of the Atlantic ocean, the sullen waves poured their foam upon the rocky bluffs and fissured crags that overhang the fiord of Christiana.

In those days, a vessel in the fiord proved an object of the greatest interest to the inhabitants of the hamlet; and it was with growing fears that the anxious housewives and weatherwise fishermen of Bergen, a little wooden town situated on the bay of Christiana, watched the exertions made by the crew of a small crayer or brigantine, of some eighty tons or so, that under bare poles, or having at least only her great square spritsail and jib set, endeavoured to weather the rocky headland to the east, and gain their little harbour, within which the water lay smooth as a millpond, forming by its placidity a strong contrast to the boiling and heaving ocean without.

The last rays of the September sun had died away on the pine-clad hills of Christiana and the cathedral spire of Bergen. Night came on sooner than usual, and the sky was rendered opaque by sable clouds, through which the red streaks of lightning shot red and forklike; while the hollow thunder reverberated afar off among the splintered summits of the Silverbergen.

Then through the flying vapour, where, parted by the levin brand, the misty rain poured down in torrents on the pathless sea, and the goodwives of Bergen told their beads, and muttered a *Hail Mary!* or a prayer to Saint Erick the Martyr for the souls of the poor mariners, who, they were assured, would find their graves at the bottom of the deep Skager Rack ere morning brightened on the waters of the Sound.

The royal castle of Bergen, a great square tower of vast strength and unknown antiquity, reared on a point of rock, still overlooks the town that in the year of our story was little more than a fisher hamlet. Swung in an iron grating on its battlement, a huge beacon fire had been lighted by order of the governor to direct the struggling ship; and now the flames from the blazing mass of tarred fagots and well-oiled flax streamed like a torn banner on the stormy wind, and lit

up the weatherbeaten visages of a few Danish soldiers who were grouped on the keep, glinting on their steel caps and mail shirts, and on the little brass minions and iron drakes that peeped between the timeworn embrasures.

Another group, which since sunset had been watching the strange ship, was crowded under the sheltering arch of the castle gate, watching for the dispersion of the clouds or the rising of the moon to reveal her whereabouts.

"Hans Knuber," said a young man who appeared at the wicket, and whose half military attire showed that he was captain of the king's crossbowmen at Bergen, "dost thou think she will weather the Devil's Nose on the next tack?"

"I doubt it much, Captain Konrad," replied the fisherman, removing his right hand from the pocket of his voluminous red breeches to the front of his fur cap, "unless they steer with the keep of Bergen and the spire of the bishop's church in a line; which I saw they did not do. Ugh! yonder she looms! and what a sea she shipped! How heavily her fore and after castles and all her top-hamper make her heel to leeward!"

"They who man her seem to have but small skill in pilot-craft," said one.

"By Saint Olaus!" cried another, "unless some one boards and pilots her, another quarter of an hour will see her run full plump on the reef; and then God assoilzie both master and mariner!"

"Luff—luff—timoneer!" exclaimed the first seaman. "Now keep her full! Would I had my hands on thy tiller!"

"Every moment the night groweth darker," said the young man whom they called Konrad, and whom they treated with marked respect: "as the clouds darken the lightning brightens. A foul shame it were to old Norway, to have it said that so many of us—stout fellows all—stood idly and saw yonder struggling ship lost for lack of a little pilot-craft: for as thou sayest, Hans, if she runs so far again eastward on the next tack she must strike on the sunken reefs."

"No boat could live in such a sea," muttered the fishermen as they drew back, none appearing solicitous of the selection which they expected the young man would make.

"The mists are coming down from the Arctic ocean—the west wind always brings them," said Jans Thorson; "and we all know 'tis in these mists that the spirits of the mountain and storm travel."

"Come hither, Hans Knuber," said the captain, whose plumed cap and rich dress of scarlet velvet, trimmed with white fur, and braided with silver like a hussar pelisse, were rapidly changing their hues under the drenching rain that lashed the castle wall, and hissed through the deep-mouthed archway. "Come hither, thou great seahorse! Dost mean to tell me thou art afraid?"

"Sir captain, I fear neither the storm nor the spirit of the mist; but Zernekob the lord of evil may be abroad to-night, and he and the Hermit of the Rock may

chance to remember how once in my cups, like an ass as I was, I reviled and mocked them both."

"Bah!" retorted Konrad, whose superstition did not go so far as that of the seaman; "Jans Thorson, I will give thee this silver chain to launch and put forth to yonder ship. Come, man—away, for the honour of old Norway!"

"Not for all the silver in yonder hills, sir captain, nor the copper in the mines of Fahlun to boot, would I trust myself beyond the Devil's Nose to-night," said the old fisherman bluntly. "I have just refused Master Sueno, the chamberlain."

"Why, 'twas just in such a storm old Christian Alborg, and his stout ship the Biornen, were blown away into the wide ocean," said another; "and I marvel much, noble Konrad, that you would urge poor fellows like us"—

"On a venture which I would not attempt myself!" exclaimed the young man, whose dark blue eyes flashed at his own suggestion. "Now, Saint Olaus forefend thou shouldst say so!"

"Nay, noble Konrad"—

"But thou dost think so?"

The fisherman was silent.

A flush crossed the handsome face of Konrad of Saltzberg. He looked seaward a moment. The wind was roaring fearfully among the bare summits of the cliffs that towered abruptly from the shore to the very clouds—absolute mountains of rock rising peak above peak; and when the blue lightning flashed among them, their granite tops were seen stretching away in the distance, while the giant pines that flourished in their clefts and gorges, were tossing like black ostrich feathers in the storm.

At the harbour mouth the waves of snow-white foam were visible through the gloom, as they lashed, and hissed, and burst in successive mountains on the rocks of worn granite that fringed the entrance of the haven.

Konrad cast a rapid glance around him, and the appalling fury of the northern storm made even his gallant heart waver for a moment in its generous purpose; but a fair female face, that with all its waving ringlets appeared at a little casement overlooking the portal, and a kiss wafted to him from "a quick small hand," decided him. His eyes sparkled, and turning briskly round to the fishermen, he said,—

"By my honour, Sirs, though knowing less of pilot-craft than of handling the boll of an arblast, I will prove to you that I require nothing of any man that I dare not myself attempt—so thus will I put forth alone—and even if I perish shame you all."

And, throwing aside his sword and short mantle, the young man rushed down the steep pathway that led to the little pier, and leaped on board one of the long light whaleboats that lay there; but ere his ready hand had quite cast off the

rope that bound it to a ringbolt on the mole, both Hans Knuber and Jans Thorson, fired by his example, sprang on board, and with more of the action of elephants, in their wide fur boots and mighty breeches, than the agility of seamen, they seized each an oar, and pushed off.

In Denmark and Norway, there were and are few titles of honour; but there has always existed in the latter an untitled nobility, like our Scottish lairds and English squires, consisting of very old families, who are more highly revered than those ennobled by Norway's Danish rulers; and many of these can trace their blood back to those terrible vikingr or ocean kings, who were so long the conquerors of the English Saxons, and the scourge of the Scottish shores.

Konrad of the Saltzberg (for he had no other name than that which he took from a solitary and half-ruined tower overlooking the fiord) was the representative of one of those time-honoured races.

The fame his brave ancestors had won under the enchanted banner of Ragner Lodbrog, Erick with the bloody axe, and Sigwardis Ring, yet lived in the songs and stories of the northern harpers; and Konrad was revered for these old memories of Norway's ancient days, while his own bravery, affability, and handsome exterior, gained him the love of the Norse burghers of Bergen, the Danish bowmen he commanded, the fishermen of the fiord, and the huntsmen of the woods of Aggerhuis.

By the glare of the beacon on the castle wall, his boat was briefly seen amid the deepening gloom as it rose on the heaving swell, and the broad-bladed oars of his lusty companions flashed as they were dipped in the sparkling water. A moment, and a moment only, they were visible; Konrad was seen to move his plumed cap, and his cheerful hallo was heard; the next, they had vanished into obscurity.

The fishers gazed on the gloom with intensity, but could discover nothing; and there was no other sound came on the bellowing wind, save the roar of the resounding breakers as they broke on the impending bluffs.

CHAPTER II.

ERICK ROSENKRANTZ.

Turn round, turn round, thou Scottish youth,
Or loud thy sire shall mourn;
For if thou touchest Norway's strand,

Thou never shalt return.
Vedder.

The hall of the castle of Bergen was a spacious but rude apartment, spanned by a stone arch, ribbed with massive groins, that sprung from the ponderous walls.

Its floor was composed of oak planks, and two clumsy stone columns, surmounted by grotesque capitals, supported the round archway of the fireplace, above which was a rudely carved, and still more rudely painted, shield, bearing the golden lion of ancient Norway in a field gules. Piled within the arch lay a heap of roots and billets, blazing and rumbling in the recesses of the great stone chimney. Eight tall candles, each like a small flambeau, flared in an iron candelabrum, and sputtered in the currents of air that swept through the hall.

Various weapons hung on the rough walls of red sandstone; there were heavy Danish ghisannas or battle-axes of steel, iron mauls, ponderous maces, and deadly morglays, two-handed swords of enormous length, iron bucklers, chain hauberks, and leathern surcoats, all of uncouth fashion, and fully two hundred years behind the arms then used by the more southern nations of Europe.

The long table occupying the centre of the hall was of wood that had grown in the forests of Memel; it was black as ebony with age, and the clumsy chairs and stools that were ranged against the walls were all of the same homely material. Several deerskins were spread before the hearth, and thereon reposed a couple of shaggy wolf-hounds, that ever and anon cocked their ears when a louder gust than usual shook the hall windows, or when the rain swept the feathery soot down the wide chimney to hiss in the sparkling fire.

Near the hearth stood a chair covered with gilded leather, and studded with brass nails; and so different was its aspect from the rest of the unornamented furniture, that there was no difficulty in recognising it as the seat of state. A long sword, the silver hilt of which was covered with a curious network of steel, hung by an embroidered baldrick on one knob thereof, balanced by a little velvet cap adorned with a long scarlet feather, on the other.

The proprietor of these articles, a stout old man, somewhere about sixty-five, whose rotundity had been considerably increased by good living, was standing in the arched recess of a well-grated window, peering earnestly out upon the blackness of the night, in hope to discern some trace of that strange vessel, concerning which all Bergen was agog. His complexion was fair and florid, and though his head was bald and polished, the long hair that hung from his temples and mingled with his bushy beard and heavy mustaches, was, like them, of a decided yellow; but his round visage was of the ruddiest and most weatherbeaten brown. There was a bold and frank expression in his keen blue eye, that with his

air and aspect forcibly realized the idea of those Scandinavian vikingr who were once the tyrants of Saxons, and the terror of the Scots.

His flowing robe of scarlet cloth, trimmed with black fur and laced with gold, his Norwayn anlace or dagger, sheathed in crimson leather sown with pearls, and the large rowelled spurs that glittered on the heels of his Muscovite leather boots, announced him one of Norway's untitled noblesse. He was Erick Rosenkrantz of Welsöö, governor of the province of Aggerhuis, castellan of Bergen, and knight of the Danish orders of the Elephant and Dannebrog.

"Sueno Thronson," said he to a little old man who entered the hall, muffled in a mantle of red deerskin, which was drenched with rain, "dost thou think there is any chance of yonder strange bark weathering the storm, and getting under the lee of our ramparts?"

"I know not, noble sir," replied Sueno, casting his drenched cloak on the floor, and displaying his under attire, which (saith the Magister Absalom Beyer, whose minute narrative we follow) consisted of a green cloth gaberdine, trimmed with the fur of the black fox, and girt at the waist by a broad belt, sustaining a black bugle-horn and short hunting sword. "I have serious doubts; for the waves of the fiord are combating with the currents from the Skager Rack, and whirling like a maelstrom. I have been through the whole town of Bergen; but neither offer nor bribe—no, not even the bishop's blessing, a hundred pieces of silver, and thrice as many deer hides—will induce one of the knavish fishermen or white-livered pilots to put forth a boat to pick up any of these strangers, who must all drown the moment their ship strikes; and strike she must, if the wind holds."

"The curse of Saint Olaus be on them!" grumbled the governor, glancing at a rude image of Norway's tutelary saint.

"Amen!" added Sueno, as he wrung the wet tails of his gaberdine.

"Didst thou try threats, then?"

"By my soul, I did so; and with equal success."

"Dost thou gibe me, Thronson? This to me, the governor of Aggerhuis, and captain of the king's castle of Bergen!" muttered the portly official, walking to and fro, and swelling with importance as he spoke.

"The oldest of our fishermen are ready to swear on the blessed gospels that there has not been seen such a storm since Christian Alborg, in the Biornen, was blown from his moorings."

"Under the ramparts of this, the king's castle, by foul sorcery; and on the vigil of Saint Erick the king, and martyr too! I remember it well, Sueno. But what! is the old Norse spirit fallen so far, that these villains have become so economical of their persons that they shrink from a little salt water? and that none will launch a shallop in such to save these poor strangers, who, unless they know the coast, will assuredly run full tilt on the Devil's Nose at the haven mouth? By

Saint Olaus! I can see the white surf curling over its terrible ridge, through the gloom, even at this moment."

"I said all this, noble sir," replied Sueno, brushing the rain from his fur bonnet; "but none attended to me save young Konrad of the Saltzberg, the captain of our Danish crossbowmen, who cursed them for white-livered coistrils, and launching a boat, with Hans Knuber and Jans Thorson the pilot, pushed off from the mole, like brave hearts as they are, in the direction of the labouring ship, which Konrad vowed to pilot round the Devil's Nose or perish."

"Fool! and thou only tellest me of this now! Konrad—the boldest youth and the best in all old Norway!" exclaimed the burly governor. "Hah! and hath the last of an ancient and gallant race to peril his life on such a night as this, when these baseborn drawers of nets and fishers of seals hang back?"

"His boat vanished into the gloom in a moment, and we heard but one gallant blast from his bugle ring above the roar of the waves that boil round that terrible promontory."

"The mother of God pray for him—brave lad! What the devil! Sueno, I would not for all the ships on the northern seas, a hair of Konrad's head were injured; for though he is no kin to me, I love the lad as if he were mine own and only son. See that my niece Anna knoweth not of this wild adventure till he returns safe. She has seemed somewhat cold to him of late; some lover's pique"—

—
"I pray he *may* return, Sir Erick."

"He must—he *shall* return!" rejoined the impetuous old knight, stamping his foot. "Yea, and in safety too, or I will sack Bergen, and scourge every fisher in it. From whence thought these knaves the stranger came?"

"From Denmark."

"Malediction on Denmark!" said Rosenkrantz, feeling his old Norse prejudices rising in his breast. "Assure me that she is Danish, and I will extinguish the beacon and let them all drown and be—!"

"Nay, nay, Sir Governor, they know her to be a good ship of Scotland, commanded by a certain great lord of that country, who is on an embassy to Frederick of Denmark, and hath been cruising in these seas."

"Then my double malediction on the Scots, too!" said the governor, as he turned away from the hall window.

"And so say I, noble Sir," chimed in the obsequious chamberlain, as he raised the skirts of his gaberdine, and warmed his voluminous trunk hosen before the great fire.

"Right, Thronson! though eight of our monarchs are buried in Iona, under the Ridge of the Kings, the death of Coelus of Norway, who is grav'd in the Scottish Kyles, still lives in our songs; and the fatal field of Largs, when aided by

such a storm as this, the Scots laid Haco's enchanted banner in the waves."

"And the wars of Erick with the bloody axe."

"And of Harold Graafeldt, his son."

"And Magnus with the Barefeet," continued the old man, whose eyes gleamed at the names of these savage kings of early Scandinavia.

"Enough, Sueno," said the governor, who was again peering from the window into the darkness; "enough, or thou wilt fire my old Norse heart in such wise by these fierce memories, that no remnant of Christian feeling will remain in it. After all, it matters not, Scots or Danes, we ought to pray for the souls that are now perhaps, from yonder dark abyss, ascending to the throne of God unblessed and unconfessed," added the old knight, with a sudden burst of religious feeling.

"God assoil them!" added Sueno crossing himself, and becoming pious too.

From the windows of the hall little else was seen but the dark masses of cloud that flew hither and thither on the stormy wind; at times a red star shot a tremulous ray through the openings, and was again hidden. Far down, beneath the castle windows, boiled the fierce ocean, and its white foam was visible when the lofty waves reared up their crested heads to lash the impending cliffs; but we have said that the bosom of the harbour was smooth as a summer lake when compared with the tumult of the fiord of Christiana. Overhead, showers of red sparks were swept away through the gloom, from the beacon that blazed on the keep to direct the waveworn ship.

"What led Hans Knuber and his brother knave of the net, to deem the stranger was a Scot? By her lumbering leeboard I would have sworn she was a Lubecker."

"Nay, Sir, her high fore and after castles marked her Scottish build; and both Hans Knuber and Jans Thorson, who have eyes for these matters, and have traded to Kirkwall—yea, and even to that Scottish sea the fiord of Forth—averred she bore Saint Andrew's saltire flying at her mizen-peak—I see nothing of her now," continued Sueno.

"See! why, 'tis so dark, one cannot see the length of one's own nose. They must have perished!"

At that moment the flash of a culverin glared amid the obscurity far down below; but its report was borne away on the wind that roared down the narrow fiord to bury its fury in the Skager Rack.

"God and St. Olaus be praised!" muttered the old knight, rubbing his hands: "they are almost within the haven mouth; another moment, and they will be safe."

"Thou forgettest, noble sir," said the chamberlain, "that the stranger's pilot may be unacquainted with the nooks and crooks of our harbour, the rocks and reefs that fringe it, and that the water in some parts is two hundred fathoms deep."

"Saidst thou not that Konrad and Hans Knuber had put off in a boat?"

"True, true! A ray of light is shining on the water now."

"Whence comes it?"

"'Tis the hermit in the cavern under the rocks, who hath lit a beacon on the beach to direct the benighted ship."

"Saint Olaf bless him! Hoh! there goeth the culverin again. We heard the report this time. They are saved! 'Tis Konrad of Saltzberg hath done this gallant deed, and heaven reward him! for many a poor fellow had perished else. Now that they are in safe anchorage, away Sueno Thronson, take thy chamberlain's staff and chain, man a boat, board this seaworn ship, and invite this Scottish lord to Bergen; for a foul shame it were in a knight of the Elephant, to permit the ambassador of a queen, to remain on shipboard after such a storm, and within a bowshot of his Danish majesty's castle: we would be worse than Finns or Muscovites. Away, Sueno! for now the storm is lulling, and under the lee of its high hills the harbour is smooth as a mirror."

Thus commanded, Sueno unwillingly enveloped himself once more in the before-mentioned fur mantle, and retired.

A blast of his horn was heard to ring in the yard as he summoned certain followers, who grumbled and swore in guttural Norse as they scrambled after him down the steep and winding pathway, that led from the castle gate to the mole of Bergen.

CHAPTER III. THE STRANGERS.

To tell the terrors of deep untried,
 What toils we suffer'd, and what storms defied;
 What mountain surges, mountain surges lash'd,
 What sudden hurricanes the canvass dash'd;
 To tell each horror in the deep reveal'd,
 Would ask an iron throat with tenfold vigour steel'd.

Lusiad of Camoens.

"How now, Anna! thou lookest as pale as if all the gnomes of the Silverbergen, or Nippen and Zernebok to boot, had been about thee. Art thou affrighted by

the storm, child?" asked Erick, pinching the soft cheek of his niece, who at that moment had entered the hall, and glided to his side in one of the great windows.

Her only reply was to clasp her hands upon his arm, and look up in his face with a fond smile.

Anna Rosenkrantz was the only daughter of Svend of Aggerhuis, the governor's younger brother, who had fallen in battle with the Holsteiners. In stature she was rather under the middle height; and so full and round was her outline, that many might have considered it too much so, but for the exquisite fairness of her skin, the beauty of her features, and the grace pervading every motion. Norway is famed for its fair beauties, but the lustre of Anna's complexion was dazzling; her neck and forehead were white as the unmelting snows of the Dovrefeldt. From under the lappets of a little velvet cap, which was edged by a row of Onslø pearls, her dark-brown ringlets flowed in heavy profusion, and seemed almost black when contrasted with the neck on which they waved. Her eyes were of a decided grey, dark, but clear and sparkling. The curve of her mouth and chin were very piquant and arch in expression; her smile was ever one of surpassing sweetness, and at times of coquetry.

A jacket of black velvet, fashioned like a Bohemian vest, trimmed with narrow edgings of white fur, and studded with seed pearls, displayed the full contour of her beautiful bust; but unhappily her skirt was one of those enormous fardingales which were then becoming the rage over all Europe.

"Have the roaring of the wind and the screaming of the water-sprite scared thee, Anna?" continued the old man, who, like a true Nordlander, believed every element to be peopled by unseen spirits and imps. "By the bones of Lodbrog!" he added, patting her soft cheek with his huge bony hand, "my mind misgave me much that this last year's sojourn at the palace of Kiøbenhafèn would fairly undo thee."

"How, good uncle?" said Anna, blushing slightly.

"By tainting thine inbred hardiment of soul, my little damsel, and making thee, instead of a fearless Norse maiden, and a dweller in the land of hills and cataracts, like one of those sickly moppets whom I have seen clustered round the tabouret of Frederick's queen, when, for my sins, I spent a summer at his court during the war with Christian II., that tyrant and tool of the Dutch harlot, Sigiberta."

"Indeed, uncle mine, you mistake me," replied Anna, "though I will own myself somewhat terrified by this unwonted storm."

"There now! said I not so? Three years ago, would the screaming of the eagles, the yelling of the wood-demon, the howl of the wind, or the tumult of the ocean, when all the spirits of the Skager Rack are rolling its billows on the rocks, have affrighted thee? Bah! what is there so terrible in all that? Do not

forget, my girl, that thou comest of a race of sea-kings who trace their blood from O'Ivarre—he who with Andd and Olaff ravaged all the Scottish shores from Thurso to the Clyde, and once even placed the red lion of Norway on the double dun of Alcluyd.[*] But I warrant thou art only terrified for young Konrad, who, like a gallant Norseman, hath run his life into such deadly peril.”

[*] A.D. 870 (Note by Mag. Absalom Beyer.)

”Konrad—tush!” said Anna pettishly.

”Ay, Konrad!” reiterated Erick testily; ”which way doth the wind blow now? By my soul, damosel, thou takest very quietly the danger in which the finest young fellow in all Norway has thrust himself—when even the boldest of our fishers drew back. He departed in a poor shallop to guide yonder devilish ship round the dangerous promontory, and if the blessed saints have not prevailed over the spirits of evil, who make their bourne in the caverns of that dark ocean—then I say, God help thee, Konrad of Saltzberg! But fear not, Anna,” continued the old man kindly, perceiving that she turned away as if to conceal tears; ”for thy lover is stout of heart and strong of hand—and—there now!—the devil’s in my old gossiping tongue—pest upon it!—I have made thee weep.”

Anna’s breast heaved very perceptibly, and she covered her face, not to conceal her tears, but the smile that spread over her features.

”Come, damosel—away to thy toilet; for know there is in yonder ship which we have watched the livelong day, and which has escaped destruction so narrowly, a certain great lord, who this night shall sup with us; for I have sent Sueno with a courteous message, inviting him to abide, so long as it pleases him, in the king’s castle of Bergen. Be gay, Anna; for I doubt not thou wilt be dying to hear tidings of what is astir in the great world around Aggerhuis; for, during the last month since thy return here, thou hast moped like some melancholy oyster on the frozen cape yonder.”

”A great lord, saidst thou, uncle?” asked Anna with sudden animation.

”Of Scotland—so said Sueno.”

Anna blushed scarlet; but the momentary expression of confusion was replaced by one of pride and triumph.

”Did thou hear of any such at Frederick’s court, little one?”

”Yes—oh yes! there were two on an embassy concerning the isles of Shetland.”

”Ah! which that fool, Christian of Oldenburg, gave to the Scottish king with his daughter Margaret? Their names?”

"I marked them not," replied Anna with hesitation; "for thou knowest, uncle mine, I bear no good-will unto these rough-footed Scots."

"Keep all thy good-will for the lad who loves thee so well," said the old man smiling, as he pressed his wiry mustaches against her white forehead. "I see thou hast still the old Norse spirit, Anna. Though three centuries have come and gone since the field of Largs was lost by Haco and his host, we have not forgotten it; and vengeance for that day's slaughter and defeat still forms no small item in our oaths of fealty and of knighthood. But hark! the horn of Sueno! There are torches flashing on the windows, and strange voices echoing, in the court. Away, girl! and bring me my sword and collars of knighthood from yonder cabinet; for I must receive these guests as becomes the king's representative at Aggerhuis, and captain of his castle of Bergen."

Anna glided from his side, and in a minute returned with a casket from the cabinet, and the long heavy sword that lay on the chair at the fireplace. She clasped the rich waistbelt round the old man's burly figure, and drawing from the casket the gold chain with the diamond *Elephant*, having under its feet the enamelled motto,

"Trew is Wildbrat,"—

and the woven collar bearing the red cross of the Dannebrog, she placed them round Sir Brick's neck, and the jewels sparkled brightly among the red hair of his bushy beard.

She then glanced hurriedly at her own figure in an opposite mirror; adjusted the jaunty little cap before mentioned; ran her slender fingers through her long dark ringlets; smiled with satisfaction at her own beauty; and took her seat on a low tabouret near the great stuffed chair, between the gilded arms of which the pompous old governor wedged his rotund figure, with an energy that made his visage flush scarlet to the temples; and he had barely time to assume his most imposing aspect of official dignity, when the light of several flambeaux flashed through the dark doorway at the lower end of the hall, and the handsome commander of his crossbowmen, Konrad of Saltzberg, with his features pale from fatigue, and his long locks, like his furred pelisse, damp with salt water, and Sueno wearing his gold chain and key, having his white wand uplifted, and attended by several torch-bearers in the king's livery, preceded the strangers.

The first who approached was a tall and handsome man, in whose strong figure there was a certain jaunty air, that suited well the peculiar daredevil expression of his deep dark eye, which bespoke the confirmed man of pleasure. He seemed to be about thirty years of age, and was clad in a shining doublet of cloth of gold, over which he wore a cuirass of the finest steel, attached to the backplate by braces of burnished silver. His mantle was of purple velvet lined with white

satin; his trunk breeches were of the latter material slashed with scarlet silk, and were of that enormous fashion then so much in vogue, being so preposterously stuffed with tow, hair, or bombast, as to render even greaves useless in battle. He wore a long sword and Scottish dagger. His blue velvet bonnet was adorned by a diamond aigrette, from which sprung three tall white ostrich feathers. His eyes were keen, dark, and proud, and their brows nearly met over his nose, which was straight; he wore little beard, but his mustaches were thick and pointed upward. His page, a saucy-looking lad of sixteen, whom he jocularly called Nick (for his name was Nicholas Hubert), came close behind him; he was richly attired, and bore a very handsome salade of polished steel.

His companion, who deferentially remained a few paces behind, was also richly clad in the same extravagant fashion. His complexion was swarthy and dark as that of a Spanish Moor. His peaked beard, his enormous mustaches and short curly hair, were of the deepest black, and his dark hazel eyes were fierce, keen, and restless in expression. In addition to his sword and dagger, which were of unusual length, he carried at his glittering baldrick a short wheelock caliver or dague; and in lieu of a corselet wore a pyne doublet, calculated to resist sword-cuts. He had a gorget of fine steel under his thick ruff; and we must not omit to add that his bulk and stature were gigantic, for he stood six foot eight in his boots.

"My lord, Sir Erick," began the chamberlain, "allow me to introduce James Hepburn, Earl of Bothwell, a noble peer, ambassador from Mary, queen of the Scots, to his Danish majesty."

The portly governor of Aggerhuis bowed profoundly, each time reversing the hilt of the long toledo that hung by his voluminous trunk hose; while the graceful Earl, with a courtesy that, to a close observer, might have seemed a little overdone, swept the hall floor with his ostrich plumes as he bowed and shook the hand of the bluff old Norwegian.

"Hark you, master chamberlain," said he, "please to introduce my friend."

"My lord, Sir Erick," began Sueno.

"Cock and pie! Bothwell! he can introduce himself without the aid of chamberlain or chambercheild," said the dark man with a bravo air. "My good lord governor, thou seest in me Hob Ormiston of that ilk, otherwise Black Hob of Teviotdale, very much at your service; and, by the holy rood!"—

"Stuff!" interrupted the Earl; "know, we swear by nought but the staff of John Knox now."

"Foul fell thee, Bothwell!" said Black Hob ironically; "art thou growing profane?"

"Art thou turning preacher?" whispered the Earl with a laugh; "but prithee act gravely before this old Norland bear, or ill may come of it. We thank you

for your gracious hospitality, fair Sir," he added aloud; "and with gratitude will exchange for this noble hall, the narrow cabin of my half sinking galliot, and the black tumbling waves of yonder devilish sea."

"The king's castle of Bergen is ever at the service of the subjects of her fair Scottish majesty; and, in the name of Frederick of Zeeland, I bid you welcome to its poor accommodation."

"And now, brave youth! by whose valour we have been saved, let me thank you," said the Scottish earl, turning suddenly with generous gratitude to Konrad of Saltzberg, who had remained a little behind. "Had you not gained our ship at that desperate crisis, and directed our wavering timoneer, it had assuredly been dashed to pieces on yonder promontory."

"Yes—noble sir—the Devil's Nose," said Sueno.

"To venture in that frail shallop through the fierce surf of yonder boiling sea, was the bravest deed I ever saw man do; and remember I come from a land of brave hearts and gallant deeds."

The Earl warmly shook the hand of Konrad, who endeavoured to gain one glance from Anna, but she was too intently regarding the strangers.

In the dusky shadow formed by the projecting mantelpiece, she had stood a little apart, but now caught the eye of the Earl, who, with an air in which exquisite grace was curiously blended with assurance, advanced and kissed her hand.

"'Tis my niece," said Rosenkrantz; but the moment the light fell full upon her blushing face and beautiful figure, Bothwell started—his colour heightened, and his eyes sparkled.

"Anna—Lady Anna!"—he exclaimed; "art *thou* here?"

"Welcome, my lord, to Bergen," she replied with a bright smile; "then you have not forgotten me?"

"Forgotten thee!" exclaimed the Earl, as half kneeling he again kissed her hand; "ah! how could I ever forget? This is joy indeed! How little I dreamt of meeting thee here, fair Anna; for when we parted at the palace of King Frederick, I feared it was to meet no more."

"Thou seest, my lord," she replied gaily; "that Fate never meant to separate us altogether."

"Then I will rail at Fate no more."

"When I prayed the blessed Mary to intercede for the poor ship, which all this live-long day we saw tossing on the waves of the Fiord, how little did I deem my prayers were offered up for you!"

"A thousand thanks, dear lady! I too prayed, now and then; but I doubt not the blessed Virgin hath rather hearkened to thee, who in purity, beauty, and innocence may so nearly approach herself."

"Cock and pie!" muttered Ormiston through his black beard, as he yawned

and stretched his stalwart form before the blazing fire; "he is at his old trade of love-making again. When a-God's name will he ever learn sense!"

"What art thou grumbling at now, Hob Ormiston?" said the Earl laughing, "when our poor crayer went surging headlong down into the dark trough of yonder angry sea, by Saint Paul! I could not choose but laugh, to hear thee alternately praying like a devout Christian, and swearing like a rascally Pagan!"

"And all because of that enchanted rope with its three damnable knots, which, despite my warnings, your lordship purchased for a rose-noble from that villanous necromancer at Cronenborg. S'death! were I now within arm's length of him, I would tie such a knot under his left ear as would cure him of wizard wit for the future."

"How, fair sirs," asked the Castellan, whose capacity for the marvellous was quite Norwegian; "this is marvel upon marvel! I deemed ye strangers, and find that you my Lord Earl of Bothwell, and Anna my niece and ward, are quite old friends—of that I will learn anon; but mean time would feign hear more of this same enchanted cord, for which it seems we are indebted for the honour of this visit to the king's"—

"Why, Sir Governor, it brought on that infernal storm, which nearly sent us all to the bottom of the sea; and as for the base minion who sold it"—

"Harkee, Hob of Ormiston," said the Earl gaily while glancing at Anna; "I will hear nothing disrespectful said of my master of the black art, whose spells have driven me within the circle of charms a thousand degrees more powerful and enchanting."

"Cock and pie!" muttered Black Hob between his teeth.

"My lords," said the Castellan, who was bursting with impatience; "about this rope"—

"At the castle of Cronenborg," replied Bothwell, "despite the reiterated warnings of my friend, our stout skipper ventured ashore to bargain with a certain necromancer who dwelleth at the promontory, and sells fair winds to the passing ships. For a rose-noble, this knave gave him a rope three Danish ells in length, whereon were three knots, each of which he solemnly avowed would produce a favourable breeze. On the first being untied, we certainly had one that carried us out of the Sound; but thereafter it died away. Our skipper cursed the wizard for his short measure, and untied the second knot, when, lo! another friendly gale rippled over the sea, and bore us to Helmstadt, off which it again fell a dead calm."

"Three handfuls of salt should have been thrown into the sea," said Sueno.

"For what?" asked Bothwell with a smile.

"Sueno is right," said Rosenkrantz; "one as an offering to Nippen, a second for the water spirit, and a third for the demon of the wind."

"Our skipper contented himself by blaspheming like a Turk," continued the Earl, "and untied the third knot, when, lo! there blew a perfect storm. The wind and the waves rose—the rain fell, the lightning flashed among the seething breakers, and—we are here."

"I will write to the king," said the governor, striking his long sword energetically on the hall floor; "I will, by Saint Erick! and learn whether this dark-dealing villain is to be permitted to trifle with the lives of nobles and ambassadors by selling charms of evil under the windows of his very palace."

"By my soul! Sir Governor, if I had him in bonny Teviotdale, I would hang him on my dule-tree, where many a better man hath swung, and make my enquiries thereafter."

"'Tis the second time this false son of darkness hath so tricked the mariner. He sold an enchanted cord to my kinsman, Christian Alborg, captain of the Biorren, a king's ship, which, on the untying of the third knot, was blown right out into the North Sea—yea, unto the very verge of those dangerous currents that run downhill to regions under the polar star, frozen and desolate shores, from whence there can be no return. But enough of this matter. Hark you, Sueno Thronson—and thou, Van Dribbel the butler—see what the larder and cellar contain: order up supper for our noble guests, and see that it be such as befits well the king's castle of Bergen."

CHAPTER IV. A NORSE SUPPER.

How goodly seems it ever to employ,
Man's social days in union and in joy;
The plenteous board high-heaped with oates divine,
And o'er the foaming bowl the laughing wine.
Odyssey, Book ix.

Bothwell surveyed the hall with a rapid glance, and then his eyes met those of his friend and vassal, Hob of Ormiston, who had been making a similar scrutiny, and he slightly shrugged his shoulders; for mentally he had been reverting to his noble castle of Crichton, that

—”rises on the steep
Above the vale of Tyne;”

his lordly towers of Bothwell, that still, magnificent in their ruins, overlook the beautiful Clyde, and therefrom he drew comparisons very disadvantageous to “the king’s castle of Bergen,” as the old castellan thereof was so fond of styling his residence.

”’Tis but a poor-looking hold this, my lord,” said Hob in French; “yet I dare swear we may put over the night in it very well.”

A shade crossed the brow of Lady Anna, as with a gentle air of pique, and in the same language, she said—

”I am grieved, noble sirs, that the accommodation of our poor house displeases you.”

”Cogsbones!” muttered Black Hob with confusion, but the Earl laughed.

”Ah, you know French!” he exclaimed with pleasure; “’tis delightful! I will be able to converse with you so much more fluently than in the broken Norse of the Shetlanders.”

”You have been in France, doubtless?” said Anna.

”Frequently, on embassies from our late queen regent, Mary of Guise and Lorraine, to the court of the magnificent Francis. Ah! some of the happiest days of my life—yes, and some of the saddest too—have been spent in the palace of the Tournelles.”

A momentary frown gathered on the Earl’s brow, but was immediately replaced by a smile.

”And has your embassy from Mary of Scotland to Frederick of Denmark been accomplished happily?”

”Not as yet, fair Anna,” replied Bothwell hurriedly, while his brow flushed; “for his Danish majesty lacks much the spirit of his Scandinavian ancestors. Yet, dear madam, I cannot but deem my sojourn in this northern clime a happy one, since it ends here,” and he slightly touched her hand.

While with open mouth the old governor of Bergen had been turning alternately from his niece to the stranger, surprised to hear them conversing so fluently in a language quite unknown to him, several servants in red gaberdines and voluminous trunk breeches laid supper on the long central table; while the warmth of the hall was increased by a number of torches placed in grotesque stone brackets, projecting from the walls, on the red masonry of which they shed a ruddy glow.

The Earl courteously handed the young lady to a seat, and placed himself beside her.

Konrad had been in the act of advancing to assume his usual chair by her

side; but finding himself anticipated, and feeling instinctively and sadly that perhaps he was not missed, he retired to the other end of the table, and seated himself beside the strong and swarthy knight of Ormiston.

"Twice hath he kissed her hand this night!" thought the young man with a bitter sigh; "that hand which I have scarcely dared to touch—and twice she seemed pleased by the attention; for her cheek flushed, and her eye sparkled with the brightness of her joy."

The evening repast was somewhat plain and coarse, as the governor made it his boast and pride to have every thing after the ancient Norwegian fashion, and would as readily have permitted poison as any foreign luxury or innovation to invade his board.

Reindeer meat, purchased from the wandering Lapps, and a trencher of pickled herrings, occupied one end of the table; a venison pie the other. There was a platter of ryemeal pudding, another of sharke, or meat cut into thin slices, sprinkled with spices, and dried in the wind; there were rye-loaves baked so hard that they would have required King Erick's axe to split them, and crisped pancakes and rolls made of meal, mixed with bark of the pine, dried and ground. There were preserved wild-fruits and cloud-berries, floating in thick cream; but the only liquors were Norwegian ale, and the native dricka, a decoction of barley and juniper-tree.

Bothwell, who, as we have said, had seated himself beside the Lady Anna, and was wholly occupied with her, scarcely remarked the rudeness of the repast; but hungry Hob of Ormiston, whose whole and undivided affections were about to be lavished on the table, looked exceedingly blank, and the aspect of the venison pie, and trencher of purple cloudberry, swimming in thick yellow cream, alone prevented him from exhibiting some very marked signs of disdain.

Supper proceeded, and was partaken of with due Scandinavian voracity. The portly governor of Aggerhuis wedged himself in his gilded chair at the head of the table; Sueno the chamberlain seated himself at the foot. Cornelius Van Dribbel, the bulbous-shaped Dutch butler of Bergen, overlooked the cups and tankards; and to the company already mentioned who occupied seats above the salt, were added a few Danish crossbowmen in the scarlet livery of King Frederick, with Hans Knuber, Jans Thorson, and the servants of the fortress, who devoured vast quantities of sharke and oatmeal bread, drenching their red mustaches in the muddy ale, as deeply as their ancestors, the fair-haired warriors of Olaff and of Ivarre, could have done.

This motley company were assisted to whatever they required by four pages, who bore the king's cipher embossed on the breasts of their crimson doublets, which had those of Erick Rosenkrantz similarly wrought on the back.

Bothwell, who had been accustomed to all those continental luxuries,

which the long and close intercourse with France had introduced among the Scottish noblesse, exchanged but one furtive glance of scorn with the tall knight of Teviotdale, and then proceeded at once to gain the heart of the honest and unsophisticated governor, by draining a long horn of ale, to the standard toast of the Nordlanders—"Old Norway!"

"*Gamle Norgé!*" cried the old governor, and all present emptied their cups with enthusiasm, not excepting the Danes; for the keen eye of Rosenkrantz was fixed upon them in particular.

Oblivious of the presence of the burly governor, of young Konrad's changing cheek and kindling eye, of bearded Ormiston's louring visage, and all others around the board, the Earl of Bothwell, with all the nonchalance of a soldier united to the suavity of a courtier, and the air of a man who habitually pleased himself without valuing a jot the ideas of others, was soon seen to make himself quite at home, to lounge on the stuffed chair, and to stoop his head so close to Anna's, that at times his black locks mingled with her glossier curls as they conversed softly in French, but with a rapidity and gaiety that astonished even themselves.

She was thus enabled to coquette, and he to make love with impunity, under the very eyes of Konrad and her uncle. The former was painfully watchful, but the latter divided his attention between a dish of savoury sharke and a great pewter flagon of dricka; for, like a true old Norseman, he was capable of eating any thing and in any quantity; and he paused at times only to impress upon Sueno Thronson the necessity of having the necromancer of Cronenborg strung up in one of his own cords.

"Holy Hansdag!" said he; "such things cannot be permitted. Vessels will never pass the Sound, and the toll will go to the devil! Konrad of Saltzberg, thou art a bold lad, and hast done gallant things in these seas against the Lubeckers, and to thee will I commit the charge of conveying this knave in fetters to King Frederick."

"If he sells fair winds, Sir Erick," began Konrad.

"Ah! but the dark son of Zernebok selleth foul as well."

"But only to strangers, and when he has none other in hand, perhaps," said Konrad with a smile; for he cordially wished that the enchanted cord had blown the Scottish earl to the Arctic regions.

"Tush, Konrad! dost thou deem my kinsman, stout Christian Alborg of the Biornen, a stranger?"

"We Scots have an old saw among us—That 'tis an ill wind that blows nobody gude," said Hob Ormiston, as he once more assailed the crisp roof of the venison pie with his long Scottish dagger; for it was not then the fashion to furnish guests with knives, and forks were the invention of a century later. "By the

mass!" thought he; "the rascal Cupid will assuredly mar thy fortune, my stout Lord Bothwell; for thou fallest in love with every pretty woman, and art ever in some infernal scrape. Thy health, Sir Governor," and bowing to Rosenkrantz, who warmly accorded, Ormiston raised to his lips a great flagon of ale, the creamy froth of which whitened the thick bristles of his black mustaches.

Bothwell and Anna still continued to converse in French.

"And so monsieur grew tired of the court of Denmark?" said Anna, with a pretty lisp in her voice.

"When you left it I soon found that little remained to detain me there. For me the sun had set—the glory had departed. I was *ennuyéed* to death, for there are no amusements such as I have been accustomed to. I marvel that so warlike a prince as Frederick holds not at times a passage of arms, or even a grand hunting party, among his knights and peers. The greasy counts and ale-swilling barons who wear the crosses of the Elephant and Dannebrog, throng the chambers of his great wooden palace; but never one among them rouses a deer in the woods of Amack, brings a boar to bay, or breaks a spear at the barriers."

"You should have set them an example, my lord," said Anna, with a half pout which she assumed at times.

"These drunken Danes would have laughed me to scorn, for they were much too wary to trust their fools' costards under steel casques for such a purpose. They never in any age knew much of chivalry; and now the new doctrines of Luther and of Calvin, like a cold blast, are laying it with other and holier institutions in the dust. I regret that I did not hang on Frederick's palace gate, my red shield, with the blue cheveron of Hepburn, as a bravado to all comers," continued the flattering Earl in his softest and most insinuating French; while he took in his the white hand of the blushing girl, "in maintenance that Anna of Aggerhuis was the fairest flower in Norway and in Denmark."

"By cock and pie! it might have hung there 'till doomsday for aught that I would have cared anent the matter," muttered Hob Ormiston.

The eyes of Anna lighted up with that vanity which the language of the Earl was so well calculated to feed, as she laughed, and said in a low and almost breathless voice—

"And would you indeed have maintained this?"

"At the point of this sword, which my good-sire drew by Pinkie-burn, I would have upheld it, madam—yea, to the last gasp!"

"I thank your courtesy, my Lord Bothwell; but," she asked in a manner that seemed perfectly artless, "what could inspire so much bravery and enthusiasm in my behalf?"

"Ah, what but love!" whispered the handsome Earl, while his dark eyes filled with the softest languor. Anna blushed crimson, and a pause ensued.

A shade perceptibly crossed the brow of Konrad. He had picked up a smattering of French while commanding his band of crossbowmen in the Lubeck war, and knew enough to perceive how dangerous to the love he had so long borne Anna, was the tendency of this discourse.

"My lord," said he, with an anger which he could not entirely conceal, "with an intent so foolish, I fear your red shield would have hung on Frederick's gate like the wood-demon's annual axe—till it rusted away, ere any man would have touched it."

"Sir Konrad," replied the Earl haughtily, "you may be right, for none will dare to dispute the beauty of Lady Anna."

"Why not?" asked Konrad with blunt honesty. "Beauty exists often in the mind of a lover alone; and all men cannot love the same woman."

The Earl smiled, and twirled his mustaches.

"Noble Sir, though I can very well perceive how you secretly scorn our northern barbarism, there are those among us who could achieve feats that the bravest and gayest of the French and Scottish knights would shrink from attempting."

Bothwell raised his eyebrows slightly, and a very unmistakeable frown gathered on tall Ormiston's swarthy brow; but here very opportunely old Rosenkrantz, pausing in the midst of some enthusiastic speech, shouted *Gamle Norgé!* and struck his empty flagon on the table.

"Ho!" said the Earl, "my brave friend, thou seemest a tall fellow, and art used, I doubt not, to mail and arms?"

"A little to the use of the salade, steel hauberk, crossbow, and dagger."

"And art a good horseman, both at the barence and on the battle-field?" added Bothwell, with a slight tinge of scorn in his manner.

"He knows not what you mean by *barence*," said Anna with a laugh, that stung Konrad to the soul. The Earl joined in it; and then, fired by sudden anger and energy, the blood mounted to Konrad's open brow, as he replied—

"Whatever a man will dare without the aid of spell or charm, that will I dare, and perhaps achieve; and though, Sir Scot, I can perceive by thine undisguised hauteur that thou scornest our rude Norse fashions and primitive simplicity, I cannot forget that there are spirits bred among these stupendous cliffs and pine-clad valleys, these boiling maelstroms and foaming torrents, second to none in the world for bravery, for honour, and for worth. I, who am the least among them in strength of heart and limb, can climb a rock that hangs eight hundred feet above the dashing surf, to win the down of the eider-duck or the eggs of the owl and eagle. With a handful of salt I can train a wild-deer from the solitary dens of the Silverbergen, or drag a white bear from its bourne on the banks of the Agger. With a single bolt from my arblast, I can pierce the swiftest eagle in full

flight, and the fiercest boar with one thrust of my hunting-spear. On midsummer eve, when Nippen and all the spirits of evil are abroad, I have sought the Druid's circle in the most savage depths of the Dovrefeldt, to hang the wood-demon's yearly gift on the great oak where our pagan ancestors worshipped Thor of old, and offered up the blood of captives taken in battle. And, in pursuit of the seal and the seahorse, I have dashed my boat right through the mist of the Fiord, even while the shriek of Uldra, the spirit of the vapour, arose from its dusky bosom."

Though superstitious to a degree, Bothwell could not repress a smile on hearing what Konrad deemed a climax to the assertion of his spirit and courage. The eyes of Anna sparkled with something of admiration as he spoke; but the Earl laughed with provoking good-nature as he replied—

"I doubt not thy courage, my friend, since to it I owe my seat at this hospitable board, instead of being, perhaps, at the bottom of yonder deep fiord; but the white bear—ha! ha! I would give a score of gold unicorns to see thee, Black Hob, engaging such a denizen of old Norway."

"Nordland bear or boor, what the foul fiend care I?" replied Ormiston, whose mouth was still crammed with paste. "God's death! many a time and oft, in bonny Teviotdale and Ettrickshaws, I have driven a tough Scottish spear through a brave English heart, piercing acton, jack, and corselet of Milan, like a gossamer web. But enow of this pitiful boasting, which better beseemeth schulebairns than bearded men."

Now the night waxed late, the great wooden clock at the end of the hall had struck the hour for retiring, and sliced sweetcake and spiced ale were served round.

Then all the company, after the Norwegian fashion, bowed to each other, and saying, "Much good may the supper do you," prepared to separate. The Earl and Ormiston were conducted, by Sueno Thronson and two torchbearers, to a chamber in the upper part of the keep.

As Konrad turned to retire, he gave a wistful glance at Anna Rosenkrantz, to receive, as usual, her parting smile; but her eyes were fixed on Bothwell's retreating figure and waving plume, and slowly the young man left the hall, with a heart full of jealous and bitter thoughts.

CHAPTER V.

THE EARL AND HOB DISCOURSE.

'Tis well for you, Sir,
 To make your love subservient to your pleasure;
 But I, who am an honourable man,
 Adore the sex too much to act so basely.

Old Play.

The Scottish guests were escorted by the chamberlain to an apartment in the donjon-tower, immediately above the hall.

It was arched with red sandstone, and, as frequently occurred in the sleeping chambers of such edifices in that age, contained two beds. These were low four-posted and heavily-canopied couches, covered with eider-down quilts of elaborate pattern; while the oak floor, according to the fashion of the country, was thickly strewn with small juniper branches, instead of straw, as in England. A dim cresset, on a long iron stalk, lighted the chamber, on beholding the primitive aspect of which the Earl and his friend exchanged significant glances; while Sueno, in courtesy to their rank, placed a handsome sword on a low tabourette that stood midway between the couches, and retired.

"'Tis a pretty knife this!" said Hob of Ormiston, as he drew the shining blade from its scabbard and surveyed it; "however, I would rather have this berry-brown whinger, that my father drew on Flodden Field," he added, unbuckling the broad baldrick that sustained his immense two-handed sword. "Doth he not seem an honest soul, this old Norwegian boor, I mean baron—craving pardon—and his dumpy little daughter?"

"Niece, thou meanest," said Bothwell suddenly, becoming all attention.

"One must speak cautiously of her, I suppose?"

"It would be wise of more than one; but," said Bothwell, "is it not remarkable that we should meet thus again? What seest thou in this?"

"In what?"

"Our unexpected meeting, after parting as we thought for ever."

"See!" yawned Ormiston, untrussing his points, "why—nothing!"

"Insensible! dost thou not see the hand of Fate?"

"Nay," said Hob ironically: "my Lord of Bothwell and of Hailes, I can perceive only the finger of mischief."

"Anna is very beautiful."

"After the fat and languid dames of Denmark, with their red locks and gaudy dresses," said Ormiston, as he slipped into bed, "there is, I own, something quite refreshing to my refined taste"—

"Thy refined taste, ha! ha!" laughed the Earl.

"I say to my refined taste," continued Hob testily, "in the grace and delicacy

of this northern nymph.”

”And I own to thee, Hob of Ormiston, my true vassal and most trusted friend, that all my old passion is revived in full force, and that I love her as I never loved”—

”Even Jane of Huntly,” said Black Hob, maliciously closing the sentence.

”Under favour, as thou lovest me, Hob,” said the noble with a frown, ”say no more of her, just now at least.”

”Ha! ha! after seeing the beauties of the Tournelles, of Versailles, and even our own Holyrood, thou art seriously smitten by this little Norwegian, eh?”

”My whole heart and soul are hers,” said the Earl in a voice that was low, but full of passion.

”Now may the great devil burn me!” cried Ormiston, as a horse-laugh convulsed his bulky figure. ”I think ’tis the twentieth time thy heart hath been disposed of in the same fashion, and I do not think that any damsel found herself much enriched by the possession thereof. As for thy soul, that being as I believe gifted already”—

”Harkee, Hob, be not insolent, for our swords are lying at hand.... Oh yes! from the first moment I met this fair girl at Copenhagen, a mysterious sympathy drew my heart instinctively towards her; and not until she left the court of Frederick did I find the full depth of my passion.”

”Substitute Holyrood for Copenhagen,” continued Hob in the same gibing tone, ”and this will be almost word for word what I once heard thee whisper to winsome Jeanie Gordon in the long gallery.”

”Damnation, varlet! thou wilt drive me mad,” cried the Earl, kicking his trunk-hose to the farthest end of the chamber; for the spiced ale of Van Dribbel was mounting fast into his brain. ”How dared your curiosity presume so far? But I care not telling thee, that I love her a thousand times more than Huntly’s sickly sister, whom perhaps I may never see again.”

”Very possibly; but, cock and pie! thou canst not mean to marry her?”

”Perhaps not, if she would sail with me on easier terms,” said the libertine Earl in a low voice.

”Please yourself,” said Ormiston, who had begun to tire of the conversation; ”but remember your solemn plight to the Lady Jane Gordon.”

”A rare fellow thou to give good advice!”

”And that, if your solemn vow be broken, our doleful case would then be worse than ever. Ten thousand claymores would be unsheathed in Badenoch, Auchindoune, and Strathbolgie; we should have another northern rebellion to welcome our return.”

”That would be merry and gay.”

”Another Corrichie to fight, and”—

"What more?"

"A Bothwell to fall."

"Sayest thou? forgetting that, like thee, I am all but ruined, and the errand on which I came hither?"

"To league with that red-haired fox, Frederick of Zeeland, for placing the northern isles in his possession, on condition that thou art viceroy thereof—a notable project!"

Bothwell coloured deeply as he replied—

"How ill my own plans sound when thus repeated to me! Yet I cannot but laugh when I imagine the expression the faces of Moray, Morton, and Lethington will assume, when those cold and calculating knaves, to whom we owe our present forfeiture and exile, hear of my Danish league. 'Twill be a masterstroke in the game of intrigue; and certes, under my circumstances, as Prince of Orkney and Shetland, holding the isles as a fief of Frederick, to wed the ward of this Norwegian knight were better than, as Bothwell, landless and penniless, to wed the untochered Jane of Huntly, and live like a trencherman or boy of the belt on the bounty of the proud earl, her brother."

"Doubtless," said Ormiston with an imperceptible sneer, "our vessel will require certain refitting, which will detain her here for some days?"

"Assuredly," replied the Earl.

"During which time we must continue to fare on raw meat, sawdust, and sour ale, by the rood! Surely we will have plenty of time to canvass our projects to-morrow; but to-night let me sleep a-God's name! for I am skinful of salt water, and wellnigh talked to death."

Ormiston was soon fast asleep, and the Earl, though of a happy and thoughtless temperament, a reckless, and often (when crossed in his pride and purposes) of a ferocious disposition, envied his ease of mind.

He too courted sleep, but in vain; for a thousand fancies and a thousand fears intruded upon his mind. The changing expression of his fine features, when viewed by the fitful light of the expiring cresset, would have formed a noble study for a painter. One moment they were all fire and animation, as his heart expanded with hope and energy; the next saw them clouded by chagrin and bitterness, when he reflected on the more than princely patrimony he had ruined by a long career of private dissipation and political intrigue—for violence, turbulence, ambition, and reckless folly, had been the leading features in the life of this headstrong noble.

The career of Earl Bothwell had been one tissue of inconsistencies.

Revolting at the ecclesiastical executions which about the period of James V.'s death so greatly disgusted the Scottish people, the Earl with his father became a reformer at an early period in life, and like all the leaders in that great

movement, which was fated to convulse the land, accepted a secret pension from the English court to maintain his wild extravagance; but when blows were struck and banners displayed, when the army of the Protestants took the field against Mary of Guise, young Bothwell, in 1559, assumed the command of her French auxiliaries, and acted with vigour and valour in her cause.

Afterwards he went on an embassy to Paris; where, by the gallantry of his air, the splendour of his retinue, and the versatility of his talents for flattery, diplomacy, and intrigue, together with his dutiful and graceful demeanour, he particularly recommended himself to Mary of Scotland, the young queen of France.

Four years afterwards, when Mary was seated on her father's throne, he had returned to Scotland; but engaging in a desperate conspiracy for the destruction of his mortal foe, the Earl of Moray, then in the zenith of his power and royal favour, he had been indefinitely banished the court and kingdom. Filled with rage against Moray, who wielded the whole power at the court and council of his too facile sister, Bothwell, finding his star thus completely eclipsed by a rival to whom he was fully equal in bravery and ambition, though inferior in subtlety and guile—and that his strong and stately castles, his fertile provinces and rich domains, were gifted away to feudal and political foemen—sought the Danish court, where he had intrigued so far, that, at the period when our story opens, a conspiracy had been formed to place all the fortresses of Orkney and Shetland in the hands of Frederick, who, in return, was to create Lord Bothwell Prince of the Northern Isles. This plot had gradually been developing; and the Earl, in furtherance of his daring and revengeful scheme, was now on his way back to Orkney, where he possessed various fiefs and adherents, especially one powerful baron of the house of Balfour of Monkquhanny.

To a face and form that were singularly noble and prepossessing, the unfortunate Earl of Bothwell united a bearing alike gallant and courtly; while his known courage and suavity of manner, in the noonday of his fortune, made him the favourite equally of the great and the humble.

Without being yet a confirmed profligate, he had plunged deeply into all the excesses and gaieties of the age, especially when in France and Italy; for at home in Scotland, when under the Draconian laws and iron rule of the new regime, the arena of such follies, even to a powerful baron, was very circumscribed.

His heart was naturally good, and its first impulses were ever those of warmth, generosity, and gratitude—and these principles, under proper direction, when united to his talent, courage, and ambition, might have made him an ornament to his country. His early rectitude of purpose had led him to trust others too indiscriminately; his warmth, to sudden attachments and dangerous quarrels; his generosity, to lavish extravagance. Early in life he is said to have loved

deeply and unhappily, but with all the ardour of which a first passion is capable of firing a brave and generous heart. Who the object of his love had been was then unknown; one report averred her to be a French princess, and the Magister Absalom Beyer shrewdly guesses, that this means no other than the dauphiness, Mary Stuart—but of this more anon.

There was now a dash of the cynic in his nature, and he was fast schooling himself to consider women merely what he was, in his gayer moments, habitually averring them to be—the mere instruments of pleasure, and tools of ambition.

The unhappy influence of that misplaced or unrequited love, had thrown a long shadow on the career of Bothwell; and as the sun of his fortune set, that shadow grew darker and deeper. But there were times, when his cooler reflection had tamed his wild impulses, that a sudden act of generosity and chivalry would evince the greatness of that heart, which an unhappy combination of circumstances, a prospect the most alluring that ever opened to man, and the influence of evil counsel, spurring on a restless ambition, hurried into those dark and terrible schemes of power and greatness, that blighted his name and fame for ever!

The character of his friend and brother exile, Hob Ormiston of that Ilk, had been distinguished only for its pride, ferocity, turbulence, and rapacity. He was one of the worst examples of those brutal barons who flourished on the ruins of the Church of Rome—the only power that ever held them in check—who laughed to scorn the laws of God and man—who recognised no will save their own, and no law but that of the sword and the strongest hand—who quoted Scripture to rifle and overthrow the same church which their fathers had quoted Scripture to erect and endow; and who, in that really dark age succeeding the Scottish Reformation, embroiled their helpless and gentle sovereign in a disastrous civil war, and drenched their native land in blood!

CHAPTER VI.

ANNA.

And when the moon went down the sky,
 Still rose, in dreams, his native plain;
 And oft he thought his love was by,
 And charm'd him with some tender strain.
The Mermaid.

The light of the rising sun was streaming through the windows next morning when the Earl awoke; and from dreams of a stormy sea, with the din of flapping canvass and rattling cordage in his ears, was agreeably surprised by finding close to his the small fair face and bright eyes of Anna Rosenkrantz—so close, indeed, that her soft hair mingled with his own, and the breath of her prying little mouth came gently on his cheek,

”Like the sweet south, that breathes upon a bank of violets.”

It was suddenly withdrawn, and Bothwell started up.

The young lady, with Christina, her attendant, arrayed in neat morning dresses, the black fur of which contrasted with the snowy whiteness of their necks and arms, stood by his bedside with a warm posset of spiced ale, according to that ancient custom, still retained in Norway, where now a dish of warm coffee is substituted for the mulled mead of their jovial ancestors, and is presented by the ladies of the house to each guest and inmate about daybreak.

In pursuance of this primitive custom, Lady Anna presented herself by the couch of the Earl, whose dark eyes sparkled with astonishment and pleasure; for various episodes of love and intrigue flashed upon his mind, when beholding the object of his admiration standing in that half dishabille at so early an hour, and a deep blush of confusion suffused the face of the beautiful girl, for the aspect of the Earl was singularly prepossessing.

His black locks curled shortly over a pale and noble forehead; his eyes were intensely dark, and the hue of his thick mustaches and short peaked beard formed a strong contrast to the whiteness of his half bare chest, which was pale as the marble of Paros.

”A good morning, my Lord!” said Anna with a delightful smile, while Christina addressed herself to Ormiston; ”I hope your dreams have been pleasant?”

”They were of thee, fair Anna”—

”Then they must have been delightful,” she replied with gaiety, eluding the Earl, who endeavoured to possess her hand. ”And you have slept well?”

”On this downy couch I could not have reposed otherwise than well, lady.”

”I am glad you appreciate what is all the work of my own fair hands; for know, sir, that this quilt of eider-down was the last essay of my perseverance and industry.”

”Thine, fair Anna!”

”Thou seest I am not one to hide my candle under a bushel.”

”By the wheel of St. Catherine!” said the Earl, smiling as he smoothed down the quilt, which was entirely made of soft feathers from the breast of the

eider-duck, woven into bright and beautiful patterns; "there is something very adorable in the idea of reposing under what your pretty fingers have wrought!"

"Konrad scaled the highest cliffs that overhang the fiord to bring me these feathers. Poor Konrad! He has clambered for me, where not even Jans Thorson or the boldest man on the bay would dare to climb, even to win his daily bread."

"And who is this Konrad?" asked Bothwell, suspiciously.

"He who—permit me to say—saved you from the ocean last night; and but for whom, perhaps, you had now been in heaven."

"St. Mary forefend it had not been a warmer place!"

"I have brought you our morning grace-cup," said Anna, placing it in his hand; "drink to the prosperity of the Lords of Welsöö, my lord, and let me begone, for I have my uncle, Sir Erick, and others, to visit with the same gift."

The Earl promptly kissed her hand, and emptied the cup, thus displaying the difference between his open nature and that of Ormiston, who, being ever on the alert against treachery and surprise, declined tasting the ale, until, as a compliment, Christina Slingbunder first put it to her rosy lips, after which he drained the goblet at one gulp, and clasping the buxom damsel in his arms imprinted a kiss upon each of her cheeks, for which she roundly boxed his ears; and, when the ladies had withdrawn, both he and the Earl lay back in their beds, bursting with laughter, for Ormiston exercised his wit in various jests on this unusual visit—jest which the modest Magister Absalom Beyer has failed or declined to record.

To his great satisfaction, the Earl found that his vessel, the *Fleur-de-lys*, a stout little brigantine, had been so much shattered by the late storm, that by the solemnly delivered verdict of David Wood his skipper, Hans Knuber, and other seafaring men of Bergen, the work of several days would be required to refit her for sea—and these days, with the recklessness of his nature, he resolved to devote entirely to the prosecution of an amour, the end of which he could not entirely foresee.

Though solemnly betrothed to Lady Jane Gordon, second daughter of George Earl of Huntly, who had been slain at the battle of Corrichie, the love he once felt and avowed for her, had evaporated during his wandering life and long absence from Scotland; and as it happened that the heart of the amorous Earl abhorred a vacuum, he gave way to all the impulses of this new passion, which the beauty and winning manner of Anna were so well calculated to inspire and confirm, and which he thought would prove a pleasing variety and amusement in his exile. A month had elapsed since they separated at Copenhagen, and that short separation had served but to increase the flame which a longer one would as surely have extinguished.

The morning meal was over; the castle hall had been converted into a court

of justice, where, seated in his red leather chair, with his orders on his breast, Erick Rosenkrantz heard pleas and quarrels, and gave those decisions which constituted him the Solon of Aggerhuis and Lycurgus of Bergen. The Earl had returned from the beach, where the entire population of the little town had crowded to witness the unusual sight of hauling his vessel into a rude dock, constructed in a creek of the rocks, where Hans Knuber and all the fishermen on the fiord had been lounging since daybreak, with their hands stuffed into the pockets of their voluminous red breeches, criticising with seaman-like eyes, and commenting in most nautical Norse, on the rig, mould, and aspect of the Scottish ship.

As Bothwell, with his white plume dancing above his lofty head, the embroidery of his mantle, and the brilliants of his belt and bonnet sparkling in the sunshine, ascended to a terrace of the castle that overlooked the fiord, the notes of a harp struck with great skill, mingling with the voice of Anna, fell upon his ear, and he paused.

She was singing an old Scandinavian air, which, being chiefly remarkable for its melody and simplicity, was admirably adapted to her soft low voice. Nothing could surpass the grace of her figure, as she bent forward over the rudely formed but classic instrument—her face half shaded by her glossy hair, that fell in profusion from under the little velvet cap before mentioned, and glittered in the sunshine, like the wiry strings among which her small white hands were moving so swiftly.

The grass of the terrace was smooth as velvet, and permitted the Earl to approach so softly, that not even his gold spurs were heard to jangle as he walked. Though Anna appeared not to perceive him, she was perfectly aware of his approach. Conscious of her skill as a musician, and of her own beauty, which she had that day taken every precaution and care to enhance, and animated by a coquettish desire to please one whom she well knew to be her lover, she continued to sing unheeding, and the Earl was thus permitted to approach (as he thought unobserved) until he leant over the parapet close beside her. He felt his heart stirred by the pathos of her voice; for, animated by an intense desire to please and to conquer, she sang exquisitely an old song, with which, in her childhood, she had heard the Wandering Lapps welcome the approach of summer.

I

”The snows are dissolving
 On Tornao’s rude side;
 And the ice of Lulhea
 Flows down its dark tide.
 Thy stream, O Lulhea!

Flows freely away;
 And the snowdrop unfolds
 Its pale leaves to the day.

II

Far off thy keen terrors,
 O winter! retire;
 And the north's dancing streamers
 Relinquish their fire.
 The sun's warm rays
 Swell the buds on the tree;
 And Enna chants forth
 Her wild warblings with glee.

III

Our reindeer unharness'd
 In freedom shall play,
 And safely by Odin's
 Steep precipice stray.
 The wolf to the forest's
 Recesses shall fly,
 And howl to the moon
 As she glides through the sky:

IV

Then haste my fair Luah"—

She paused, and gradually a blush deepened on her cheek, for with all her graceful coquetry and gaiety, there was at times a dash of charming timidity in her manner; so, suddenly becoming abashed, she raised her mild eyes to those of the Earl, and immediately cast them down again, for his cheek had flushed in turn, increasing the manly beauty of his dark features, which the shadow of his blue velvet bonnet, and the graceful droop of his white ostrich feather, en-

hanced; and she knew that his eyes were beaming upon her with the sentiment her performance and her presence had inspired.

She had read it all in his burning glance, and at the moment she cast down her eyes, a new sensation of joy and triumph filled her heart. The experienced Earl was aware that the fair citadel was tottering to its fall.

"Gentle Anna," said he, in his softest and most dulcet French, "for my unseasonable interruption I crave pardon, and beg that you will continue, for every chord of my heart is stirred when you sing."

"There is but one verse more," replied Anna, as she bent her head with a graceful inclination, and shaking back her long fair tresses, continued—

IV

"Then haste my fear Luah,
 O haste to the grove!
 To pass the sweet season
 Of summer in love.
 In youth let our bosoms
 With ecstasy glow;
 For the winter of life
 Ne'er a transport can know."

"Sadly true it is, fair Anna," said the amorous Earl, as he leaned against the

gothic parapet, and very nonchalantly played with his fingers among her flowing ringlets; "youth is indeed the only season for love and joy—for due susceptibility of the blooming and the beautiful."

"And for futile wishes and dreamy fancies," replied the young lady with a sad smile.

"Dost thou moralize?" laughed the Earl; "why, gentle one, I who am ten years thy senior have never once dreamt of morality yet—moralizing I would say—ha! ha! that will suit when my years number sixty or so, if some unlucky lance or sword-thrust does not, ere that time, spoil me for being a doting old monk; for, as the white-haired Earl Douglas said, when he in old age assumed the cowl, 'One who may no better be, must be a monk.' (By the mass I would make a rare friar!) To me there is something very droll in hearing a pretty woman moralize. And so thou considerest youth the season for dreams and fancies?"

"O yes! for now I am ever full of them."

"'Tis well," replied Bothwell, glancing at the rugged castle, and its still more rugged scenery; "for there are times when the realities of life are not very pleas-

ant. But hath not old age its fancies too, and its dreams?"

"True, my Lord, but dreams of the past."

"Nay, of the present. Faith! I remember me when I was but a boy at Paris, old Anne, Madame la Duchesse d'Estampes, who might have been my grandmother, fell in love with my slender limbs and beardless chin, and wellnigh brought me to death's door with her villanous love philtres. From those days upward, my own mind has been full of its fancies, fair Anna, and I have had my daydreams of power and ambition, of love and grandeur, and wakened but to find them dreams indeed!"

"Those of love, too," murmured Anna.

"Yes—yes," said the Earl, whose face was crossed by a sudden shade, which Anna's anxious eye soon perceived; "why should I conceal that, like other boys, I have had my vision of that land of light and roses—visions that faded away, even as the sunlight is now fading on yonder mountain tops—and the hour came when I wondered how such wild hopes had ever been cherished—how such dreams had ever dawned—and I could look back upon my boyish folly with a smile of mingled sadness and of scorn."

"'Tis a bitter reflection that a time may come when one may marvel that one ever loved, my lord."

"And hoped and feared, and made one's-self alternately the victim of misery or of joy—raised to heaven by one glance, and sunk into despair by another. Yet, dear as a first love is while it lasts—at least so say minstrel and romancer—there are thousands who live to thank Heaven that they were not wedded to that first loved one."

"Dost thou really think so?" colouring with something of pique at the tenor of this conversation, which made her think of Konrad.

"The experience of my friends in a thousand instances hath taught me so," said the politic Earl, who began to feel that the topic was unfortunately chosen; "but," he added adroitly, as sinking his voice he took her hand in his, "dear Anna, never will the day come when I shall thank Heaven that I was not wedded to thee."

Again the quick blush rushed to Anna's neck and temples; she bent over her harp, and said in a low but laughing voice—

"Fie! Lord Bothwell, surely I am not your first love?"

"Thou art, indeed, dear Anna!"

"Go, go! I will never believe it."

"My first, my last, my only one!" said the Earl, encircling her gently with his arms, and pressing her forehead against his cheek; and, though this assertion was not strictly true, in the ardour of the moment he almost believed it so. "Until the moment we parted at Frederick's palace gate—parted as I thought to meet no

more—I knew not how deep was my unavowed love for thee. Hear me, Anna, dear Anna! I love thee with my heart of hearts—my whole soul! My name, my coronet, all I possess, are at thy feet; say, dear one, canst thou love me?”

Borne away by the ardour of his passion, he brought out this avowal all at a breath—“for,” sayeth the Magister Absalom, “he had repeated it, on similar occasions, twenty times”—and, pressing her to his heart, slipped upon her finger a very valuable ring.

“Canst thou love me, Anna,” he continued in a broken voice, “as I love thee—as my bride, my wife? and”—Anna replied an inaudible something, as she hung half-fainting with confusion on his breast.

Bothwell had almost paused as he spoke, half scared by his own impetuosity, and feeling, even in that moment of transport, a pang, as the thoughts of ambition and the world arose before him.

And the ring!

By the false Earl, the fond giver of that little emblem of love was forgotten. On the inside was engraved—

”The gift and the giver,
Are thine for-ever.”

It was the pledge of betrothal from Jane Gordon of Huntly, and now it sparkled on the hand of her rival!

”As this circlet is without end, so without end will be my love for thee, Anna,” said the impassioned noble, forgetting that with these very words, for that ring he had given another, before the prelate of Dunblane. Anna trembled violently; she felt his heart beating against her own, and a new, rapid, and consuming sensation thrilled like lightning through every vein and fibre. She became giddy, faint; and, like a rose surcharged with dew, reclined her head upon the shoulder of the handsome Earl.

”And thou art mine, Anna—mine, for ever!”

”O, yes—for ever!” she whispered; and passionately and repeatedly Bothwell’s dark and well mustached mouth was pressed on her dewy lip.

Footsteps approached!

He started, and hurriedly led her to a seat; placed her harp close by, raised her hands to his lips with an air in which love and tenderness were exquisitely blended with courtesy and respect, and then hurried away.

Overcome, and trembling with the excitement of this brief interview, Anna bent with closed eyes over her harp for a moment; but becoming suddenly aware that some one stood near her, she started, and the pallor of death and guilt over-

spread her flushed face when her eyes met those of—Konrad.

CHAPTER VII.

KONRAD.

To lose thee! O, to lose thee! To live on
 To see the sun—not thee! Will the sun shine,
 Will the birds sing, flowers bloom, when thou art gone?
 Desolate—desolate! Thy right hand in mine.
King Arthur.

Konrad's dark blue eyes were regarding her with a peculiar expression, such as she had never before seen them wear. There was an intense sadness in it, mingled with pity and scorn. It was searching and reproachful, too; and, though Anna felt all that single glance conveyed, she never quailed beneath it; but the blood came and went in her changing cheek as she surveyed her indignant lover.

The appearance and bearing of young Konrad were very prepossessing.

During the whole of that day he had been out hunting, and was now returned laden with the spoil of forest and fiord. A doublet of white cloth, trimmed with black fur, slashed with scarlet sarcenet at the breast and sleeves, and adorned with a profusion of silver knobs, fitted tightly to his handsome figure; his trunk hose were fashioned of the same materials, and he wore rough leather boots, and a smart velvet cap adorned by an eagle feather, under which his long hair descended in fair locks upon his shoulders. He was equipped with a cross-bow, hunting-knife, and bugle-horn, and a sheaf of short arrows bristled in his baldrick. An immense cock-of-the-wood and a bag of golden plover were slung over one shoulder, balanced on the other by a pouch of seabirds' eggs, taken from their eyries in those impending cliffs that overhang the bay, where, clinging as a fly clings to a wall, he had scrambled and swung fearlessly above the surf; and, chief spoil of the day, he bore upon his shoulder a black fox, which he had slain by a single bolt from his crossbow.

His natural colour had been increased by exercise; and he looked so handsome and gallant as he sprang up the terrace steps with his unwound arblast in his hand, that Christina Slingsunder sighed as he kissed her dimpled hand a moment before, when enquiring for her mistress; but now the mind of that fickle

mistress was too full of Bothwell's image to think much, if at all, on her former lover.

Unwilling to admit to her those bitter suspicions and jealousies that were harrowing up his heart, Konrad addressed her as usual, and with an air of affected gaiety laid the spoil of his bow and spear at her feet. She bowed in silence, and regarded them dreamily.

"See how beautiful is the fur of this fox! Will not its blackness contrast well with your snowy skin, dear Anna?"

"Tush!" said she, a little pettishly; "flatter not thyself, good Konrad, I will make me trimmings of an odious fox-skin; away with it!"

Konrad was piqued by this unusual reply, but he still continued—

"Then behold this great woodcock; see how broad, how dark and beautiful are its pinions!"

"Truly, good Konrad, thou teazest me," replied Anna, stroking them with her white hands, but thinking the while how much its plumage resembled Bothwell's black locks.

"And where thinkest thou I winged him, Anna, with a single bolt from my arblast?"

"I know not," she replied vacantly.

"Thou wilt never guess," continued Konrad, resuming something of his tender and playful manner, despite the palsy in his heart. "In the Wood Demon's oak."

"Then this bird may cost thee dear, for the demon will avenge it some day!"

"Already he is avenged!" said Konrad, with sudden bitterness.

Anna smiled, for she knew his meaning well.

"Oh, Anna!" said the young man, laying his hand earnestly on hers; "how changed thou art! what have I done to offend thee?"

"Nothing!"

"Then, by some accursed magic this ring hath bewitched thee!"

"Ring!" she reiterated, changing colour.

Konrad dashed his crossbow on the earth.

"And is it so?" he exclaimed; "O Anna! Anna! like Zernebok, the spirit of darkness and of evil, this Scottish Earl hath crossed my path. I saw him salute thy cheek again and again, yet thou didst not reprove him. Even wert thou to love me again as of old, the charm would be broken; and O, my God! there is nothing left me but to wish we had never met!"

Anna leaned upon the parapet, and averted her face a little. The accents of Konrad's voice—that voice she had once loved so well—sank deep in her heart; but Bothwell's kiss, still glowed upon her cheek, and her heart was steeled against remorse.

"Anna," continued her lover, in a tone of sadness, "so completely was my life identified with thine, that we seemed to have but one being—one existence: the love of thee was a part of myself. I have often thought if thou wert to die, I could never live without thee; but I have lost thee now by a separation more bitter than death. Thou knowest, Anna Rosenkrantz, how long, how well I loved thee, ere thou went to Frederick's court; and in truth I had many a bitter doubt if, at thy return, I would find thee the same artless and confiding girl that left me."

"And when I did return?" asked Anna, with a smile.

"Thou hadst forgotten to love me," replied Konrad clasping his hands.

"'Tis the way of the world," laughed Anna.

"The cruel and selfish world only."

"Be it so."

"Then thou lovest me no more?"

Anna played for a moment with the fringe of her stomacher, and then replied "*No!*"

The young man turned away with an unsteady step, and pressed his hand upon his forehead, as if he would crush some overpowering emotion. Anna lifted her little harp, and was about to retire. Konrad took her hand, but she abruptly withdrew it; a pang shot through his heart, and something of remorse ran through her own at the unkindness of the action.

He caught her skirt, and besought her to listen to him for the last time.

"Anna, dearest Anna!" he said in a breathless voice; "oh, never was there a love more pure or more devoted than mine! Long, long ago, I endeavoured to crush this passion as it grew in my breast, for I knew the gulf that lay between us—thou, the daughter of Svend of Bergenhus, the wealthy and ennobled merchant, famous alike for his treasures and his conquests over the Burghers of Lubeck and the Dukes of Holstein—I, the representative of a race that have decayed and fallen with the pride of old Norway, even as their old dwelling on yonder hill," and he pointed to the ruined tower on the distant Saltzberg; "even as it has fallen almost to its foundations. As these convictions came home to my heart, I strove to crush the expanding flower—to shun thee—to avoid thy presence, as thou mayest remember; but still thine image came ever before me with all its witchery, and a thousand chances threw us ever together. Ah! why wert thou so affable, so winning, when, knowing the secret that preyed on my heart, thou mightest so much more kindly have repulsed me? why encourage me to hope—to love—when thou wert to treat me thus?"

"Enough of this," faltered Anna; "permit me to pass—I can hear no more."

"How cruel—how cold—how calculating! It is very wicked to trifle thus with the best affections of a poor human heart. O Anna! in all the time I have loved you so truly and so well, it was long ere I had even the courage to kiss your

hand.”

”Because thou wert ever so timid,” said Anna, with a half smile.

”Timid only because my love was a deep and a sincere one. But what were my sensations,” and he grasped his dagger as he spoke; ”what agony I endured, on seeing this accursed stranger kiss your cheek?”

Anna’s colour deepened, and again she endeavoured to retire.

”Oh, tarry one moment, Anna!” continued the poor lover in a touching voice, and kneeling down while his eyes filled alternately with the languor of love and the fire of anger. ”In memory of those pleasant hours that are gone for ever, permit me once again to kiss this hand—and never more will I address you. Refuse me not, Anna!”

”Thou tirest me!” she replied, stretching out her hand, but averting her face; for the beautiful coquette had ”a smile on her lip and a tear in her eye”—a smile, for she could not repress her triumph in exciting so much love—and a tear, for she could not stifle her pity.

Konrad kissed her hand with the utmost tenderness. It lingered a moment in his, but was suddenly withdrawn. The light left his eyes; a curtain seemed to have fallen between him and the world—and he was alone.

On the terrace which had been the scene of this sad interview, he lingered long, with his heart crushed beneath a load of conflicting emotions. The love he had so long borne Anna now began to struggle with emotions of wounded self-esteem and anger at her cold desertion. Jealousy prompted him to seek some deadly vengeance, and from time to time he cast furtive glances at his steel arblast, with its sheaf of winged bolts, that lay among the spoil he had brought from the forest. Had the Earl of Bothwell appeared within bowshot while these evil thoughts floated through the brain of Konrad, our history had ended, perhaps, with the present chapter; but, luckily, he was at that moment engaged at the old game of Troy with Sir Erick in the hall.

”I could not slay him!” thought the young man, generously, as other emotions rose within him; ”no, not even if he smote me with his clenched hand. She seems to love him so much, that his death would be alike a source of misery to her and deep remorse to me. Dear Anna! thy happiness will still be as much my aim as if I had wedded thee; but I pray God thou mayest not be deceived, and endure—what I am now enduring!”

These generous thoughts soothed not his agony; and bitter was the sense of loneliness, of misery, and desolation, that closed over his heart in unison with the shadows of evening that were then setting over the wide landscape below.

”And she coldly saw me weep!” he exclaimed.

He felt that he must leave Bergen and the presence of Anna—but for whence? Whether for the desolate settlements of the half-barbarian Lapps, or

the wars of the Lubeckers and Holsteiners, he could not decide. His love of the chase inclined him to the first; his weariness of life, to the last.

Such were his thoughts; but at two-and-twenty one seldom tires of existence, whatever its disappointments and bitterness may have been.

The sun had set on the distant sea, and the long line of saffron light it shed across the dark blue water died away; the gloomy shadows of the rocks and keep of Bergen faded from the bosom of the harbour, and red lights began to twinkle one by one, in the little windows of the wooden fisher-huts, that nestled on the shelving rocks far down below, among a wilderness of nets, and boats, and anchors.

From the terrace of the castle, miles beyond miles of rocky mountains were seen stretching afar off in blue perspective towards the surf-beaten Isles of Lofoden; and, tipped by the last red light of the sun that had set, their splintered and rifted peaks shot up in fantastic cones from those endless forests, so deep, and dark, and solemn—so voiceless, and so still. Konrad's melancholy meditations were uninterrupted by a sound; no living thing seemed near, save a red-eyed hawk that sat on a fragment of rock.

He could hear his own heart beating.

Though his mind was a prey to bitterness the most intense, he watched the sunset, and the changing features of the landscape, with all the attention that trifles often receive, even in moments of the deepest anguish.

Gradually the shadows crept upward from the low places to the mountain tops. Each long promontory that jutted into the far perspective of the narrow fiord, was a steep mountain that towered from its glassy bosom in waveworn precipices; between these lay the smaller inlets, long and narrow valleys full of deep and dark blue water, that reflected the solemn pines by day, and the diamond stars by night. Some were dark and sunless, but others glittered still in purple, gold, and green, where the eider-duck floated in the last light of the west; and all was still as death along the margin of that beautiful bay, save the roar of a distant cataract, where a river poured over the chasmed rock, and sought the ocean in a column of foam.

Night drew on; the bleating of the home-driven kids, the flap of the owl's wing, and faint howl of a wandering wolf, broke the stillness of the balmy northern eve; while the wiry foliage of the vast pine-forests, that flourished almost to the castle gates, vibrated in the rising wind, and seemed to fill the dewy air with the hum of a thousand fairy harps.

Konrad, who, with his face buried in his hands, had long reclined against the rampart of the terrace, was startled to find close beside him a tall dark man, whose proportions, when looming in the twilight, seemed almost herculean, intently examining the great wood-cock, in the bosom of which a cross-bow bolt

was firmly barbed.

Filled with that inborn superstition which is still common to all Scandinavia, his first thought was of the terrible *Wood Demon*, in whose venerated oak he had so heedlessly and daringly shot the bird. Animated by terror, such as he had never known before, a prickly sensation spread over his whole frame, and even Anna was partially forgotten in the sudden horror that thrilled through him, as, with an invocation to God, he sprang upon the battlement of the terrace.

The dark stranger uttered a shout, and sprang forward. Konrad's terror was completed.

He toppled over, made one palsied and fruitless effort to clutch the grass that grew in the clefts of the ancient wall, and failing, launched out into the air; down, down, he went, disappearing headlong into that dark abyss, at the bottom of which rolled the ocean.

"Cock and pie!" muttered Black Hob, with astonishment; (for it was no other than he,) as he peered over the rampart, "was it a madman or a bogle that vanished over the wall like the blink of a sunbeam?"

He stretched over, cast down one hasty glance, and instinctively drew back; for far down at the base of the beetling crags, he saw the ocean boiling, white and frothy, through the obscurity below.

A wild and unearthly cry ascended to his ear.

"By the blessed mass, a water-kelpie!" muttered Ormiston, as he hurried away in great disorder.

Konrad escaped a death on the rocks, but, falling into the ocean, arose to the surface at some distance from the shore. Breathless and faint by his descent from such a height, he could scarcely (though an excellent swimmer) make one stroke to save his life. A strong current running seaward round the promontory, drove a piece of drift-wood—a pine log—past him. He clutched it with all the despair of the drowning, and, twining himself among its branches, was thus swiftly, by the currents of the fiord, borne out into the wide waste of the Skager Rack.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COCK-OF-THE-WOODS.

In woman thou'rt deceived; but that we
Had mothers, I could say how women are,
In their own natures, models of mere change;

Of change from what is nought, to what is worse.
The Lady's Trial.

In Norway there existed (and exists even unto this day) a certain malicious spirit, who is ever on the alert to poke a finger in every body's affairs, and to put every thing wrong that ought to be right. He hides whatever is missing, and brings about every mischance that happens to man, woman, or child—to horse and to dog—to the huntsman in the woods—to the fisher on the fiord. The blame of every ill is laid on the shoulders of this unfortunate and omnipresent sprite—NIPPEN; who, though secretly blamed, cursed, and feared, must outwardly be spoken of with reverence and respect, or his unremitting vengeance and malevolence are certain and sure.

Always after nightfall, to obtain his good-will, a can of spiced ale is deposited in a certain nook of every household for the especial behoof of the thirsty imp; who, if he cannot find time to empty all the cans so liberally bestowed, generally permits some of the wandering Lapps, the houseless dogs or questing foxes, that are ever wandering after nightfall, to have that pleasure; so that next morning Nippen's ale-can is usually found empty in its place.

In the castle of Bergen it was the morning occupation of Anna to spice a cup of ale until it was exquisitely flavoured, and then, in accordance with the still existing superstition, Christina Slingbunder placed it in a solitary nook of the terrace, for the prowling spirit of mischief, who nightly found it there; but Sueno Thronson frequently and somewhat suspiciously averred, that Nippen came in the shape of a Danish crossbowman to drink it.

On the evening mentioned in the preceding chapter, Ormiston, chancing to pass that way, observed the bright flagon standing in its sequestered niche, and drew it forth. He surveyed it with great interest in various ways—and then tasted it. The flavour was delicious, and he drained it to the bottom.

The spiced liquor mounting at once to the brain of Hob, threw a sudden cloud over all his faculties, which were never very bright at any time; and thus next morning he had no remembrance of his adventure with Konrad on the terrace, on the preceding evening. At the same hour, however, he failed not to examine the same place; and finding there another mug of that divinely flavoured beverage, without hesitation transferred the contents to his stomach, much to the disappointment of a certain Danish soldier, who, finding himself anticipated a second and third time, began with some terror to imagine that Nippen was at last beginning to look after his property in person.

The fumes mounted to the Knight of Ormiston's brain; and carolling the merry old ditty of "The Frog that came to the Mill Door," he danced round the

terrace, kicking before him the cock-of-the-woods, that was still lying where Konrad had left it. As he was about to descend, Bothwell, gaily attired, with his eyes and countenance radiant with pleasure, sprang up the stair, taking three steps at a time.

"Good-morrow, noble Bothwell!" said Ormiston, balancing himself on each leg alternately.

"What the devil art thou following now, eh?" asked the Earl.

"My nose, for lack of something better!"

"Thou seemest very drunk! Surely the ale at dinner to-day was not over strong for thee. But, harkee, I have triumphed!"

"Indeed! but the fact is, I am too drunk at the present moment to see exactly how!"

"Guzzler! thou understandest me very well!"

"A notable triumph for one who, if rumour sayeth true, broke many a sponce and many a spear at the Tournelles for the love of a French princess!"

Bothwell coloured deeply; a dark frown gathered on his broad brow, and his dark, expressive eyes filled with light; but the expression and the momentary emotion passed away together.

"I value thy gibes not a rush. To me all the world is now concentrated in this rude Norwegian castle!"

"What a difference between a man who is in love like thee, and one who is not, like me!"

"My stout Hob, thou knowest more of foraying by Cheviot side, and harrying the beeves of Westmoreland, than of making love!"

"Heaven be praised, for I have known this same love turn many a bearded man into a puling boy."

"It can exalt the heart of a coward into that of a hero. It can expand the bosom of the austere hermit into that of a jovial toper"—

"And endow Bothwell, the hellicate rake, with all the virtues of Bothan, the saint and confessor."

"I wish all the imps in hell had thee!" said the Earl, turning away.

"I thank thee for thy good wishes," replied his friend, reeling a little; "and so thou hast really and irrevocably given thy heart to this grey-eyed Norwegian."

"Grey-eyed, thou blind mole! Her eyes are of the brightest and purest blue."

"I say *grey*, by all the furies! and I protest, that I love neither grey-eyes nor the name of Anna."

"Wherefore, most sapient Hob?"

"Because I never knew an Anne that was not cold-hearted, or a grey-eyed woman that was not cunning as a red tod."

"Marry! a proper squire to judge of beauty," said the Earl laughing; but,

nevertheless, feeling very much provoked. "But thou wilt know how to shape thy discourse, when I say that I am about to ask her hand of Erick Rosenkrantz."

"By St. Christopher the giant, thou art mad!" said Ormiston, with a gravity that shewed the assertion had sobered him; "be wary, be prudent. Should the Lord Huntly"—

"My malediction on Huntly! He shall never see my face again; so it matters not. He may bestow his pale sister, the Lady Jane, on some ruffling minion of the bastard Moray, the crafty Morton, the craftier Maitland, or of the thundering Knox, who now have all the sway in that court, where the outlawed Bothwell shall never more be seen." And with one hand twisting his mustaches, and the other playing with the pommel of his dagger, the Earl strode away, and left his friend and vassal to his own confused reflections.

Bothwell, who had ever been the creature of impulse, without delay sought old Sir Erick of Welsöö, whom he found seated in a nook of the ramparts, basking in the long lingering sunshine, and sheltered from the evening wind by the angle of the turret. His long sword rested against one arm of his chair, a pewter mug of dricka was placed on the other, and before him stood Sueno, cap in hand, receiving certain orders with all due reverence.

"What the devil is this Van Dribbel tells me?" he was saying as Bothwell approached. "All the beer soured by the thunder-storm! I marvel that it hath not soured my temper too, for there never was a man so crossed, I tell thee, Sueno. It was my wish that Konrad should have undertaken the capture of this necromancer, and seen him hanged in one of his own devilish cords; and now Konrad is nowhere to be found. How dares he leave the precincts of Bergen without my permission?"

"His Danish archers have searched every where," said Sueno, "even to the base of the Silverbergen, sounding their horns through the forest, along the shores of the fiord, and the margin of the bay; and I would venture my better hand to a boar's claw, that the Captain Konrad is not within the province of Aggerhuis."

"Sayest thou so!" exclaimed the Knight Rosenkrantz, who, between the attention required by his offices of castellan and governor,—the machinations of a water-sprite who dwelt in the harbour of Bergen, where he daily wrought all manner of evil to the fishermen,—Nippen, who made himself so busy in the affairs of all honest people on the land,—the gnomes of the Silverbergen, who stole his poultry,—and the cantrips of a certain mischievous demon inhabiting the adjacent wood, and had thrice turned three fair flocks of Sir Erick's sheep into field mice, in which shape he had seen them vanishing into mole-tracks in the turf, where a moment before they had been browsing,—the old governor, we say, who, with all these things to divert his attention, never found time hang heavy on his hands,

made a gesture of anger and impatience, and he swore a Norse oath, which the Magister Absalom Beyer has written so hurriedly that our powers of translation fail us; but he added—

”My mind misgiveth me that something is wrong. Away, Sueno, take a band of archers, and once more beat the woods with shout and bugle, and if Konrad appears not by sunrise to-morrow, by the holy Hansdag I will—not know what to think.”

The threat evaporated; for honest Rosenkrantz loved the youth as if he had been his own son.

Though Bothwell had a grace, effrontery, or assurance (which you will) that usually carried him well through almost every thing he undertook, and which won every one to his purpose, he could not have chosen a more unfortunate crisis for the startling proposal, which he made with admirable deliberation and nonchalance to the portly Rosenkrantz; who no sooner heard the conclusion, than he said with a hauteur, to which Bothwell, at all times proud and fiery, was totally unaccustomed, and which he did not think this plain unvarnished Nordlander could assume—

”Excuse me, I pray thee, my Lord Earl of Bothwell. Though I venerate your rank and mission, as ambassador from the Queen of the Scots (here the Earl’s cheek glowed crimson), I cannot give my niece to you, even were I willing to bestow her. She is the first and only love of my young friend, Konrad of Saltzberg, as gallant a heart as Norway owns; he to whose daring you and your friends owed preservation on the night of the storm. From childhood they have known and loved each other, yea, since they were no higher than *that*,” holding his hand about six inches from the ground; ”growing up, as it were, like two little birds in the same nest, twining into each other like two tendrils from the same tree; and a foul stain it would be on me to part them now, even though King Frederick came in person to sue for the hand of Anna.”

”Hear me, Lord Erick,” began Bothwell, alike astonished and offended at the rejection of a suit, which he secretly thought was somewhat degrading to himself.

”I know all thou wouldst urge,” said Erick, shaking his hand; ”but this may not, cannot be; for thou art a man too gay and gallant to mate with one of our timid Norwegian maidens.”

The inexplicable smile that spread over the Earl’s face, shewed there was more in his mind than the honest Norseman could read. He was about to speak, when Sueno approached bearing in his hand a dead bird, and having great alarm powerfully depicted in his usually unmeaning face.

”Oh, Sir Erick—Sir Erick—what think you? last night Konrad of Saltzburg shot this cock in the Wood Demon’s oak!”

"Now, heaven forefend!" exclaimed the Castellan, sinking back in grief and alarm. "Then, Sueno, thou needst search no more. God save thee, poor Konrad!"

"How—how, wherefore?" asked Bothwell; "what has happened?"

"We shall never behold him more. He hath assuredly been spirited away," replied Rosenkrantz in great tribulation; for in the existence of all those elementary beings incident to Norse superstition, he believed devoutly as in the gospel; "he hath been spirited away, and enclosed Heaven alone knoweth where—perhaps in a rock or tree close beside us here—perhaps in an iceberg at the pole"—

"Amen!" thought Bothwell, who would have laughed had he dared; "I would that the Captain of Bergen were keeping him company!"

"O Sueno! thou rememberest how it fared with thy brother Rolf, when he stole acorns from that very tree?"

"Yes—yes—as he crossed the Fiord in the moonlight, a great hand arose from the water, and drew down his boat to the bottom—and so he perished. Poor Rolf!"

"And with the father of Hans Knuber, who left his axe resting against it one evening, in the summer of 1540?"

"An invisible hand hurled it after him, and broke both his legs."

"And Gustaf Slingbunder, who pursued a fox into its branches, was bewitched by the demon in such wise, that he ran in a circle round the tree for six days and nights, till his bones dropped asunder."

"Saint Olaus be with us!"

Erick Rosenkrantz and Sueno continued to gaze at each other in great consternation, while Bothwell looked at them alternately with astonishment, till the blast of a horn at the gate arrested their attention, and a Danish archer approached, to inform his excellency the Governor of Aggerhuis, that a royal messenger from Copenhagen required an audience.

"So this unmannerly boor hath rejected my suit!" muttered the haughty Earl, as he turned away; "mine—by St. Paul! I can scarcely believe my senses. If my *roué* friends d'Elboeuff or Coldinghame heard of it, they would cast a die to decide which was the greater fool—Bothwell or Rosenkrantz. Rejected! Be it so; but to have this damsel on my own terms shall now be my future care."

CHAPTER IX.

LORD HUNTLY'S LETTER.

All self-command is now gone by,
 E'er since the luckless hour when she
 Became a mirror to my eye,
 Whereon I gazed complacently.
 Thou, fatal mirror! where I spy
 Love's image.
Bernard de Pentadour.

Anna, who might have formed some excuse for Konrad, (whom she supposed to have voluntarily expatriated himself, as he threatened,) maintained a silence on the subject of their last interview, and, wholly occupied with her new and glittering lover, troubled herself no more about the old one.

She was teaching the Earl the polsk, the national dance of the Norse, and to which they are enthusiastically attached. Christina and three other attendants played on the ghittern, harp, and tabor, taking at times a part in the figures of the dance.

While the Earl, with his cloak and rapier flung aside, and having one arm round the waist of Anna, was performing with her a succession of those rapid whirls which make this dance so closely to resemble the modern waltz, Black Hob of Ormiston entered the hall, and beckoned him with impatience in his gestures.

"How now!" said the Earl, pausing; "is the devil in the bush again? Thou hast a face of vast importance, Hob. By Jove! it seems to swell out even that voluminous ruff of thine!"

"Peradventure there be reason. Behold! here are letters from Copenhagen."

"Hah! say you so?"—

"Sent by that king's messenger who came hither but an hour ago!"

"Pardon me, Lady Anna," said the Earl with sudden confusion; "I must speak with my friend, but will rejoin you in a few minutes. Whose seals are these, Hob?" he asked, as they descended to the terrace, hurriedly by the way, examining the square packets, which were tied with ribbons, and sealed with wax at the crossing. "By the Holy Paul! 'tis from Frederick of Denmark this!"

"And this from the Earl of Huntly; see! it bears the boar-heads of Gordon and the lions of Badenoch!"

"O, death and fury! it will be but one tissue of reproaches and upbraidings from the Lady Jane. Throw it into the sea!"

"What! wilt thou not read it before?"

"I could scarcely do so *after*. Read it thyself!" replied Bothwell; "for Huntly and I have nothing now in common!"

Each tore open a letter, and began slowly and laboriously to decipher the

cramped and contracted hand-writing so common to the sixteenth century. The effect of these communications was very different on the readers. A bright smile spread over the broad visage of the Knight of Ormiston; while a frown, black as a thunder-cloud, gathered on the dark brow of Bothwell.

"Fury!" he exclaimed, crushing up the letter. "God's fury, and his malison to boot! be on this white-livered dog—this foul traitor!"—

"Who—who?"

"Frederick"—

"How—the King of Denmark and Norway! These are hard names for his majesty to receive within his own fortress of Bergen. What tidings?"

"He declines all further correspondence with me concerning the Shetland Isles, and threatens, that if by the vigil of Saint Denis—now but three days hence—we are found within the Danish seas, to send me captive to Queen Mary, with a full account of my mock embassy. 'Tis some machination of my foeman, Murray."

"Devil burn him!" said Hob. "Well, is it not better, after all, to be Lord of Bothwell and Hailes, at home in pair auld Scotland, than Prince of Orkney and Lord of Hialtland, branded as a traitor till the very name of Hepburn becomes (like that of Menteth of old) a byword and a scoff in every Scottish mouth—banned alike in the baron's hall and at the peasant's hearth—while thou wouldst writhe hourly to free thy head from under the sure claws of the Danish lion."

"Right, Hob! Throw his letter into the sea, and, if thou art clerk enough, let us hear what our noble friend, the Lord Huntly, sayeth."

Ormiston read as follows:—

"To the Right Honorable my very good Lord and especial friend, James Earl of Bothwell, Lord of Hailes, Liddesdale, and Shetland, High Admiral, Sheriff of Haddington, and Bailie of Lauderdale, *Give this in haste—haste—haste.*

"We write to hasten your return, as the Queen's Majesty hath relaxit your Lordship and the worshipful Laird of Ormiston from the horn, and hath banished the Lords Moray, Morton, and others, your enemies, into England, quhere they are now residing and resett at the frontier town of Berwick, for the slaughter of umquhile David Rizzio, her Grace's Italian secretary. Her Majesty desireth me to recal you to her presence, with solemn assurance that your sentence of forfeiture is reversed, your fiefs and honours restored. My dearest sister, the Lady Jane, and my bedfellow, the Lady Anne, send their devoted love to your Lordship.

"So the blessing of our Lady be with you, and grant you long life and great commoditie!

"Done at our castle of Strathbolgie in the Garioch, on the vigil of St. Cuthbert the Confessor, 1565.

"HUNTLE."

Ormiston threw up his bonnet, his black eyes flashed and filled with tears, as he exclaimed—

"Now, God's blessing on her Grace! from this hour I am her leal man and true. Now man, Bothwell, I am sick to death of this grim Norway castle, and its old ale-drinking, chess-playing, and pudding-pated castellan, who is part woodman, part fisherman—half knight, half bear—and I long to see the yellow corn waving on my ain rigs of Ormiston, with the grey turrets of my auld peel-tower, looking down on bonny Teviotdale. Would I were there now, and three hundred of my tall troopers with lance, and horse, and bonnets of steel, all trotting by my side. Benedicite!"

"Three hundred devils! thy wits have gone woolgathering. I have promised love and troth to Anna; and if I return with her as my bride, Huntly and Aboyne, Black Arthur and Auchindoune, will all come down like roaring lions from the hills of Badenoch and the wilds of Strathbolgie—so that I may as well stay here and face Frederick."

"What! dost thou fear a feud with the gay Gordons?"

"Thou knowest," replied the Earl haughtily, "that I fear nothing, as I shall show thee. I love this girl with my whole heart, Ormiston; yet now, when the first fierce burst of love is past, I see the folly of a man like me being tied like a love-knot to a woman's kirtle."

"Leave her behind thee here."

"I cannot—I cannot! What a moment of imbecility was that, when I betrothed myself to Jane of Huntly!"

"A cursed coil! women on both hands; danger in returning and danger in remaining. Our Lady direct us!"

"Dost think she will interest herself in the affairs of such a couple of rascals as we are?"

"Thou speakest for thyself."

"Nay, I speak for thee in particular."

"Thou gettest angry," said Ormiston; "remember the old saw—'He that is angry is seldom at ease.'"

"Tush! True it is," said Bothwell musingly, after a long pause—"I love Anna better than my own life, and, because winning her may cost me some trouble and danger; yet I feel that to wed her is to wreck my ship on a dangerous shore. I am grown indifferent to Lady Jane, because I may have her for the asking—besides, I am sick of dark eyes."

"Especially Parisian!"

The Earl's brow knit, but he continued gently—

"I have promised marriage to both; and to one my plight must be broken. What matters it? 'Tis only to a woman; and did not one whom I loved with all

the depth and holiness of a first love, slight that passion as valueless, and laugh me to scorn when she chose another?"

"Remain here, and we shall be sent captives to Scotland, where all the particulars of our pretended embassy to Denmark will be discovered."

"And if I return with this little Norwegian by my side, St Paul! but I must keep my best sword buckled there too."

"Any thing thou likest, but let us leave this desolate land. Let us once more have our feet on Scottish ground, and our hands on our bridles; we shall then make our own terms with Huntly and the Queen. If this dame Anna will go"—

"Go! oh, thou knowest not how the little creature loves me! Ardent and impulsive to excess, she will follow me wherever I list."

"While the fit lasts," rejoined Ormiston drily. "Take her with thee, but leave her with some of thy friends in Orkney till we hear how matters go at Holyrood. There is old Sir Gilbert Balfour of Westera, will keep her close enough in his strong castle of Noltland, where, when once thou seest the queen again, she may chance to remain for the term of her natural life."

Hob paused, and scratched his rough beard with a knowing expression; for he knew enough of his friend to foresee how matters would be in a month.

"Out upon thee, Hob!" said he; "thou art ever prompting me to some knavery."

"But this letter of Huntly"—

"Thank heaven it came!"

"Thou wert about to throw it into the sea."

"St. Mary! but for its contents we must have sailed on a hopeless quest to France, to Italy, or to heaven knows where; for I am already too well known by evil repute throughout the most of Europe. But away, Ormiston, to the harbour. Seek David Wood, our wight skipper, and that red-breeched knave, Hans Knuber, who assists him. Let them have our *Fleur-de-lys* ready to sail. I will hie me to Anna, and 'tis not unlikely we may put to sea about dusk."

A smile was exchanged.

"Gramercy!" said the knight, "I hope she will not forget to bring her maid, who views my outward man with a favourable eye, so that we may all sail merrily together. Hey for hame! By cock and pie! I almost fancy myself at my ain tower-yett, with my broad banner displayed, and my stout horsemen behind me. Ho! for one headlong gallop by Ettrickshaws or Teviotside—*Te Deum laudamus!* God's blessing on our own land, that lies beyond sea, for it is like no other!" and whirling his bonnet round his head, more like a great schoolboy than a strong man of six feet eight inches, Ormiston with one bound sprang down the steep steps leading from the terrace to the shore; while the Earl, somewhat slowly and thoughtfully for so ardent a lover, returned to the presence of Anna, who, piqued by his long

and unceremonious absence, was pleased to receive him with a pouting lip and a clouded brow, which his caresses soon dispelled.

CHAPTER X

THE HERMIT OF BERGEN.

When fortune makes the match, she rages,
 And forsakes the unequal pair;
 But when love two hearts engages,
 The kind god is ever there.
 Regard not, then, high blood nor riches,
 You that would his blessings have;
 Let love, untaught, guide all your wishes.
 Hymen should be Cupid's slave.
Sir Charles Sedley.

The Reformation had been accomplished in Denmark and Norway, during the reign of Frederick I., about thirty years before the period of which we write. It had made great progress among the simple and half barbarian Norse, who, though they had laid the ancient hierarchy in the dust, received nothing equal in exchange; and consequently the codes of religion and morality lay lightly on the necks of the people.

A Catholic church was still permitted at Gluckstadt; the title of bishop, the auricular confessional, the crucifix, and other Romish rites and ceremonies, were still retained, though the government was avowedly and essentially Lutheran. Some persons adhered rigidly to the ancient form of worship, others to the new; but many more took a middle and very convenient course, and for a time believed in—nothing.

It was while matters were in this state, particularly in the province of Aggerhuis—that a half-crazed monk, who had belonged to a suppressed monastery in Fuhnen, and whose brain was said to have been turned by the severities to which he had been subjected, by the ecclesiastical superintendent of the reformed church in that diocese, became an anchorite, and undisputed occupant of a cavern on the fiord, near the castle of Bergen. The fame of his austerity, the severity of his penances, and the circumstance of his having made his

dwelling in a cavern which for ages had been the reputed habitation of Zernebok, an evil demon, whose name is familiar to the Norse, had been quite enough to procure him a fame beyond the province of Aggerhuis. By night the fishermen shuddered, crossed themselves, and sedulously avoided the long ray of light that streamed from the mouth of his deep cavern upon the glassy waters of the bay; for, notwithstanding his reputation for sanctity and holiness on the one hand, he was dreaded for possessing various supernatural and unpriestly attributes on the other.

But to return from this digression, which was necessary, as the hermit is about to be introduced with due formality to the reader, we may briefly state that the gay Earl, notwithstanding all his eloquence and powers of persuasion, which were very great, failed to prevail on Anna Rosenkrantz to make an unconditional elopement with him; nor would her pride and self-esteem permit her to trust implicitly to one whom she knew to have earned at Copenhagen the dubious reputation of a finished gallant and accomplished courtier.

Much as she loved him, and—notwithstanding her inconstancy to Konrad, she loved him well—Anna could not so utterly sacrifice the name and honour of her family, or be so oblivious of that delicacy which a Norwegian maiden so seldom forgets; and thus, though Bothwell urged with all the oily eloquence that love, ardour, and gallantry lent him, the danger of that delay which would sacrifice him to Rosenkrantz, who in three days, by the king's mandate, would be compelled to make him a prisoner, Anna only wept, and would not—could not—consent to accompany him, unless—

"Unless we are wedded; is it not so, dearest Anna?" said the handsome noble, as she reclined helplessly and in tears on his bosom, within an alcove of the terrace that overlooked the bay.

Anna made no reply.

"Decide, dearest, decide!" urged the Earl, pointing to his ship that was now gallantly riding in the fiord, with her white canvass half unloosed, and glimmering white in the faint twilight of the northern evening. "Decide! for by the express command of the governor, your uncle, I must be far beyond yon blue horizon ere the sun rises; and then thou wilt see me no more!"

Anna sobbed bitterly, and she thought of the triumph the rejected Konrad might feel and display, if the Earl sailed without her. Proud, and perhaps not a little artful, her heart was torn by love, doubt, and anguish; and her answers were very incoherent.

"Oh! what would my uncle Rosenkrantz say, if" —

"I have bade adieu to Rosenkrantz, and he deems me already on board. Since the arrival of King Frederick's mandate, he has been so full of vapour and dignity, that though I cannot but laugh at it, we can hold no further communi-

cation; and if, after my late proposal, which he so scornfully rejected, he knew I was here—and with thee”—

”True, true, we would be separated.”

”And for ever! I know your scruples, dearest Anna,” said the Earl tenderly; for, moved by her tears, and the utter abandonment in which she reclined on his breast, with her face half hidden by the bright masses of her hair, and by her position permitting soft glimpses of a full and beautiful bosom, he felt that he loved her with his whole heart; and that the troth he had plighted to Lady Gordon, the vengeance of the fierce Highland noble her brother, and the wrath or favour of the Scottish court, were all alike to be committed to oblivion. Love bore all before him victoriously for the time; and Bothwell, ever the creature of impulses, yielded to that of the moment.

”Hear me for the last time,” he urged. ”The good hermit, of whom I have heard you speak so often, and whose abode is in the cavern among yonder rocks, from which we now see a ray of light that trembles on the water, will unite us, and in my own land will I wed thee again, with such magnificence as becomes a bride of the house of Hailes. Consent, dearest Anna! and one blast on my horn will bring a barge to the beach; refuse, and we must part, Anna, never to meet again.”

She could make no reply, but drew closer to her winning lover, and exchanged with him one long and passionate kiss, and Bothwell knew that he had triumphed.

”My beloved Anna!” he murmured, as he raised her in his arms, and felt at the moment that ever to love another than this fair being, who trusted to him so implicitly, would be sacrilege, and an impossibility.

”Christina—call Christina Slingbunder! Oh! I cannot go alone,” she sobbed.

Bothwell, aware that there was not a moment to lose, beckoned to the waiting-woman, who had been lingering at the corner of the terrace; and who, without knowing what was to ensue, followed him, while he half led and half bore her mistress down the steep and devious pathway that led to the beach.

Darkness had almost set in; the long Norwegian twilight had given place to starry night, and they were unseen by the Danish sentinels, who lounged dreamily on the summit of the keep, and at the castle gate of Bergen. As he descended, Bothwell drew from his embroidered belt a small but exquisitely carved bugle-horn, accoutred with a silver mouthpiece, on which he blew one short and sharp blast of peculiar cadence, that drew an echo from every rock and indentation of the harbour. Ere the last had died away, the sound of oars was heard, the water was seen to flash in the starlight, and a boat glided into the dark shadow thrown by the castle rocks upon the deep water of the fiord; it jarred against the landing-place, and Christina Slingbunder, who was about to make some violent

protestations against proceeding, had the strong arm of Ormiston thrown around her.

"Welcome, Bothwell!" said he; "never heard I sound more joyous than thy bugle; for the last hour our wight skipper hath been swearing like a pagan."

"Wherefore?"

"At thy delay."

"Then the knave most e'en solace himself by swearing on."

"He says, if this breeze continues, we will be past Frederick's-vaern by sunrise."

"All the better, Hob," replied the Earl, as he lifted Anna on board; "but I hope he hath our demi-culverins cast loose, and a few yeomen in their armour, in case of surprisal."

"Right—dost thou not see I am in harness?" said Ormiston, making his steel glove clatter on his corselet; for, save the head, his whole bulky frame was completely armed. The eight seamen who pulled the boat were all clad in pyne doublets, and armed with swords and daggers, and they wore the national head-dress, the broad bonnet of blue worsted, adorned with a silver coronet and horse's head—the Earl's crest.

"Now, my stout varlets," said their lord, "dip, and away!"

"Away for the ship!" added Ormiston.

"Nay, for the hermit's grotto under yonder rocks, where thou seest a light now gleaming on the water. Away, and a golden angel on the best oar!"

Ormiston gave a low whistle, expressive of surprise and pity at the folly of his friend, and endeavoured, by a series of somewhat unceremonious caresses, to console the sobbing and half-frightened Christina, who had begun to weep most obstreperously; but he knew enough of the Earl's temperament to be aware that any remark was now futile; and in reality, as he cared not a rush whether he married the Norwegian or not, he resolved to let matters run their course.

All sat silent, and nothing was heard but the interjections of the waiting-woman, and the suppressed breathing of the stout oarsmen, as the boat strained and creaked when their sinewy efforts shot her out into midstream. Anna reclined against the shoulder of the Earl, with her face hidden in a satin hood, and his mantle of crimson velvet rolled around her.

Now rising in her silvery glory from the sea, the broad round moon, with a splendour impossible to describe, aided the brightness of the northern night. One broad gleam of steady radiance extended up the fiord from the horizon to the shore; and when, like a black speck, the boat shot across it, the breakers of the distant ocean, like wavelets of silver, were seen rising and falling afar off, amid the liquid light.

The summit of the rocks of Bergen, and the square tower that crowned

them, were shining snow-white in its splendour, but their base was hidden in more than Cimmerian gloom; for though the bright moonlight tipped the eminences and peaks of the far off mountain, the darkness of midnight rested on the bosom of the still fiords and bays that rolled in shadow a thousand feet below them.

From the murky obscurity of a mass of granite, that overhung the deepest part of the fiord, where the rocks descended like a wall abruptly to their foundations, many fathoms under the surface of the water, a faint and flickering light, that gleamed redly and fitfully, directed the steersman to the uncouth dwelling of this hermit of the sea. A sudden angle of the rocks revealed it, and the oarsmen found themselves close to a low-browed cavern, that receded away into the heart of the granite cliffs that overhung the surf.

A seaman made fast the boat, by looping a rope round a pinnacle of rock near the narrow ledge, where the fishermen of Bergen usually left such alms and offerings as fear or piety impelled them to bestow on the hermit, whom they alike dreaded and respected. On these rocks the sea-dogs basked in summer, and shared the hermit's food in winter, when they crawled through the crevices in the ice, that for six months of the year covered the water of the bay.

The Scottish mariners, who did not altogether like their vicinity to the abode of this mysterious personage, cowered together, conversing in low whispers; and their swarthy visages seemed to vary from brown to crimson, in the red smoky light that gushed at times from the mouth of the rugged cavern, as the ocean wind blew through it. Bothwell, who could not for a moment quit the trembling Anna, requested Hob of Ormiston to acquaint the recluse with the nature of the boon they had come to crave of him.

Participating in the fears of the mariners, Hob evidently did not admire venturing on this mission alone. On one hand, a powerful curiosity prompted him; on the other, a childish superstition, incident to the age, withheld him: but he was a bold fellow, whose scruples of any kind never lasted long, and in a minute he had loosened his long sword in its sheath, looked to the wheel-lock of his dagger, and sprung up the rocks. His tall feather was seen to stoop for a moment as he entered the cavern, and made signs of the cross as he advanced; for though the Laird of Ormiston, like most of the lesser barons in Scotland for a generation or two after 1540, professed no particular creed, any ideas he had of religion appertained to the Church of Rome—therefore the aspect of the cavern, as he penetrated, was singularly adapted to make a deep impression on his mind.

A pile of drift-wood blazing in a cleft of the rock, through which its smoke ascended, filled the cavern with warmth; and a red glow, that lit up the rugged surface of its rocky walls and arched roof, displaying the wild lichens that spotted them, and the green tufts of weed that grew in the crannies.

A myriad of metallic particles, green schorl, blue quartz, rock crystal, and basaltic prisms, glittered in the blaze of the hermit's fire. It revealed also the strange and ghastly fissures of the cavern, which had been formed by some vast subterranean throes of nature, that had rent asunder the solid mountains; and, by hurling one gigantic mass of rock against another, formed this deep retreat, into which Hob of Ormiston penetrated with a resolute aspect but a hesitating heart.

The roar of a subterranean cataract, that poured down white and foaming behind one of these ghastly seams, lent additional effect to the aspect of the cavern—at the upper end of which stood an altar of stone, having on it a skull polished like ivory by long use, a rude crucifix, and the words—

Sancte Olaf ora pro nobis,

painted above it on the wall in large and uncouth characters. At the approach of Ormiston, the hermit arose from his lair or bed of dried seaweed, and a more wild and unearthly object had never greeted the eyes of his visitor.

His years might number sixty; he was perfectly bald, and his scalp shone like that of the skull, to which his visage, hollow-eyed and attenuated to the last degree, would have borne no distant resemblance but for the long white beard of thin and silvery hair that flowed to his waist. He was clad in the skin of the sea-dog, and his bare legs and arms were so lean that they resembled the bones of a skeleton, with veins and fibres twisted over them. As the hermit arose, Ormiston paused; and while he gazed with irresolution, the wild man did so with wonder; for the Scottish knight was richly accoutred in a suit of plate armour; his hose were of scarlet cloth twined with gold, and the band of his blue velvet bonnet, like the hilt of his dagger, sparkled with precious stones.

"Heaven save you, father!" said he, uncovering his head, and speaking in that broken Norwegian dialect which he had acquired among the Shetlanders.

"And what, may I ask, hath procured me a visit from a son of vanity and trumpery like thee?" asked the old man of the rock, surveying Ormiston with a glance approaching to disdain.

"An errand of friendship, good father," replied the other, whose uneasiness was in no way soothed when he saw, by the restless and unearthly aspect of the hermit's eyes, that he was evidently insane; "from one who hath a boon to crave of thee."

"Of me—Ha! ha!" laughed the hermit, and the reverberations of his laughter, that echoed a hundredfold through the fissures of the cavern, seemed to the imaginative ear of Ormiston like that of fiends ringing from an abyss, and, signing the cross, he involuntarily drew back. The wild hermit seemed to enjoy his terror, and laughed louder still.

"What wouldst thou have? a blessing implored upon thy vessel, that neither the mermaids of the moskenstrom nor the water-spirit may bewitch it; nor that Nippen may come in the night and turn thy compass round from north to south, and so lead thee within the folds of the mighty Jormagundr, that great ocean snake which lieth coiled up under the frozen regions of the pole, and one dash of whose tail makes the great whirlpool to boil for a century? Hah!"

"Nay, good father," said Ormiston; "for none of these things have I sought thee, but to crave a blessing and the bands of wedlock for a knight and lady, who choose rather to receive their nuptial benediction from thee, who art a remnant of our ancient faith, (Heaven forgive me this vile blasphemy!) than from one of these newfangled parsons whom King Frederick hath planted in Norway."

"Good," replied the hermit, as a smile spread over his ghastly visage; "and what return will be made me if I concede to your request?"

"Return!" stammered Ormiston, taking a silver chain from his neck, but immediately replacing it, for he saw that he had not to deal with an ordinary man. "Holy father! though the lady is noble, and the knight is both noble and wealthy, they can make no other return than a promise to hold thy name in kind remembrance, and pray for thee daily, in memory of the blessing thou wilt bestow."

"Good again—thou pleasest me; let these strangers approach."

"By what name art thou known, father?"

"The fishermen call me the Hermit of the Rock. When I lived in the world I had another name. I was Saint Olaf of Norway."

"Now, God keep the poor hermit!" said Ormiston; "five hundred years have come and gone since that blessed preacher and converter of these wild lands from paganrie to the true faith, rested from his holy labours."

"Five hundred years!—thou sayest right well. All that time have I dwelt in this cavern, where I shall perhaps dwell five hundred more; but lead forward thy friends."

"Blessed Jupiter!" muttered Ormiston, as he hurried away, "methought the tying of this pretended nuptial knot was likely to cost more trouble than the untying of those on the enchanted cord. What, ho! my Lord of Bothwell."

"Odsbody!" exclaimed the Earl, "thou hast tarried long enough in all conscience. Is the occupant of this place man or woman?"

"Neither, by Jove! I think him half saint, half Satan, and wholly intolerable."

Anna trembled, and her attendant shrieked with terror, when they were lifted on the ledge of the rock that led to this uncouth dwelling. The seamen, whom the Earl had no wish should witness a ceremony which he might one day prefer to have forgotten, he desired imperatively to remain by their oars, and, as they were all his own vassals, they dared not to disobey.

"You will not follow me unless you hear my bugle blown, in sign that we are in some peril; and, by St. Andrew, the place looks perilous enough! But take courage, dearest Anna!" he whispered, "for I am with thee!"

Anna answered only by tears, and kept her face hidden within her hood. Her fears, and those of Christina Slingbunder, were no way allayed by the appalling aspect of Saint Olaf—the hermit of whom they had heard so many tremendous tales; and even Bothwell, as thorough a daredevil as ever drew sword, was startled for a moment; but, pressing Anna closer to him, he advanced at once to the hermit—and, in virtue of the vows he had once pronounced, requested him to unite them in marriage, and bestow his benediction upon them.

Tall Ormiston held his bonnet before his mouth; for a broad laugh spread over his dark and burly visage when he saw the Earl kneeling before this uncouth priest, whose insanity was so evident that even he, a border baron, felt some shame and reluctance at the profanity and folly of the adventure. When viewed by the light of the pine fire, that at times died away and anon shot up redly and fitfully, the aspect of this wild man of the rock, with his attenuated legs and arms clad in a gaberdine of seal-skin, his long and bushy beard glistening tremulously in the flame like streaming silver, his deeply sunk yet sparkling eyes of most unearthly blue—gave him all the appearance of a half crazed scald or saga from the frozen caves of Iceland—he seemed so spectral, so shadowy, and so like the wavering vision of a dreamer.

Sinking with terror and confusion, Anna had but a faint idea of all that passed around her, until she found herself once more in the bright moonlight with another ring on her finger, Bothwell's arm around her, and her burning cheek resting against his; while the diamond-like water flashed around them as it fell from the broad-bladed oars, and the seamen pulled hard and silently away from the cavern. The appearance of the hermit, who stood on a pinnacle of rock holding aloft a blazing pine branch with one hand, while he bestowed benedictions with the other, adding not a little to the energy with which they increased the distance between them and the shore. The Earl saw that the poor recluse was perfectly insane, yet there was something singularly wild and sublime in his aspect; he seemed so like an inspired prophet, or seer, or one of those strange demons with whom Norse superstition peoples every element, every wood, and rock, and hill.

Cheerfully pulled the stout rowers, and again the towers of Bergen rose above them, shining snow-white in the light of the autumnal moon. As they neared the ship, the startled Ormiston muttered a curse and a *Hail Mary!* in the same breath, when a long line of fire suddenly gleamed across the bosom of the water, and there shot past their bows a swift boat, in which stood a tall figure brandishing a spear; his whole outline was dark and opaque, while a blaze of

light shone behind him.

”’Tis only a night-fisher!” said Anna, with a smile; and now one more stroke of the oars brought them alongside of the Earl’s ship, from the mizen-peak of which his own banner, bearing the chevrons of Hepburn and the azure bend of Dirleton, waved heavily in the night wind.

The *Fleur-de-lys* was gaudily painted and gilded, low in the waist, but high in the bows and poop, where two great wooden castles, bristling with falcons and arquebuses, towered above the water. Each mast was composed of two taper spars, fidded at the topcastles. The Earl’s crest—a white horse’s head—reared up at the prow, balanced by a mighty lantern at the stern. Her sails were loose, and glimmered in the moonlight as they flapped heavily against the yellow masts and spars.

The Earl was welcomed by a shout from the sailors, who, with the master and his mates, crowded, bonnet in hand, around him.

Giving orders to sail immediately for the Isles of Orkney, he bore Anna to the little cabin, that, during his wanderings by the Adriatic and Italian shores, had received many a similar tenant. Like a boudoir, it was hung with the richest arras, lighted by silver lamps that were redolent with perfume, as they swung from the deck above, and from globes of rose-coloured glass shed a warm and voluptuous glow around the lovers.

CHAPTER XI. THE FLEUR-DE-LYS.

I’ll lo’e thee, Annie, while the dew
 In siller bells hangs on the tree;
 Or while the burnie’s waves o’ blue,
 Run wimplin to the rowin’ sea.
Scott Song.

It is difficult, says the Magister Absalom, to analyse the nature of the Earl’s love for this fair but fickle Norwegian.

His conscience and his interest led him to remember, that adherence to those vows so solemnly exchanged with Lady Jane Gordon, was the most honourable and prudent course; but this sudden passion, conceived by him for Anna

Rosenkrantz at the Court of Copenhagen, and pursued in that rash and obstinate spirit with which he plunged into every new amour and vagary, soon made him commit to oblivion those vows which one yet fondly and sadly brooded over. A temporary separation, an unexpected meeting, as shown in the beginning of our story, had fully developed his sentiments for Anna, and in this mock marriage brought them to a crisis.

Having been frequently abroad, under every variety of fortune—at one time commanding a French army during a desperate civil war; at another, charged with an important embassy; and often an exile desperate in circumstances—in the wandering life he had led for many a year, his career had been one of such wild adventure and danger, that his code of morality fitted him loosely as his gauntlet; thus, with all the love he bore Anna, though as yet he shrank from wedding her before the altar of that church where he had knelt in childhood, this espousal of her, before a half-witted Norwegian hermit, exactly suited the wildness of his fancy and the romance of his temperament.

His trusty friend and libertine follower, Hob of Ormiston, whose fate and fortune were so completely identified with his own, knew, from old experience, that the flame of his lord had expanded too suddenly to burn long; and as the love fit and the voyage would in all probability end together, he would not have objected to wedding Christina Slingbunder in the same easy and fantastic fashion, although he was already handfasted, as the phrase was, to a lady of gentle blood at home.

Though she saw not the clouds that overhung her future career, Anna was very much dejected, when next morning she lay with her head reclining on the shoulder of that lover to whom she had sacrificed herself, and the love of Konrad; and into whose hands she had committed the honour of her family and her future fate.

Bright rose the sun from the waters of the Skager Rack; the hills of Denmark were on their lee, and those of Norway, with all their pouring waterfalls and echoing woods, were lessening far astern. A gentle breeze was blowing from the westward; and as the heavily-poooped ship careened over, her great white lateen sails bellied before it, and the bright green water flashed from her sharp prows to bubble in snowy showers under the head of the white steed that, with blood-red nostrils and arching neck, reared beneath the gallant bowsprit.

The sailors, with Nicholas Hubert and the Earl's other pages and servants, were grouped in the forecastle and in the deep waist, over which peered the brass arquebuses of the poop. The skipper, Master David Wood of Bonyngtoun, in Angus, with a great gaudy chart (such as was then prepared in the Hanseatic towns for the use of mariners) spread on the capstan, was intently measuring the distance from the Naze of Norway to the Oysterhead of Denmark; from thence

to Thorsmynde, and so on.

He was a short, squat man, with a thick scrubby beard and heavy eyebrows; he wore his blue bonnet drawn well over his forehead, to keep the sun from his eyes, and had a gaberdine of blue broadcloth, with immense pockets at the sides, red trunk breeches, which met a pair of black funnel boots about three inches below the knee. He carried a pocket-dial and a long dagger at his girdle.

Hob of Ormiston, minus weapons and armour, without which he was never seen on shore, was yawning with ennui, wishing, as he often said, "sea-voyaging at the devil," and (in absence of Christina, who was very sick a-bed) endeavouring to wile away the time by watching for an occasional shot at the passing birds with his wheel-lock caliver, and whistling the old air then so much in vogue—

"The Frog cam to the Myll doore."

Anna and the Earl were seated under a small tapestry awning, which screened them from the view of the groups in the waist on one hand, and from the watch and timoneer on the other. Her eyes were full of tears.

"Anna, dearest, why so sad?" said the Earl, pressing his dark mustaches against her white forehead. "Do you regret the step you have taken for my sake?"

"Oh no!" she whispered in a soft low tone; "but I sorrow when I think of the knight Rosenkrantz, my poor old uncle, who since infancy has been so kind to me; my dear and only kinsman, when worn out by years and their infirmities, to be left alone by me in his old age—by me whom he loves so well! Who now will soothe him in sickness as I have done, and cheer him in the long nights of winter when I am far away? My place will be vacant at the board to-day, my chair by the fire to-night. My harp stands there beside it, but he will hear my voice no more. Oh! he will be very lonely—desolate!" Her tears fell fast and bitterly.

"Speak not thus, dear Anna!" said the Earl, kissing her again; and, glad to say any thing that might soothe her, he added, "We will return to him again, and together will we cheer his declining years."

"But he never will forgive me, nor love me as of old."

"He will! We shall kneel at his feet and implore his forgiveness, (Ormiston whistled very loud); and, if he loves you so well, he could never resist your supplications."

He kissed her with ardour, and the girl was soothed.

Fondly and trustfully she looked in his face. There was a light in her clear eyes, a flush on her soft cheek, and an infantile smile on her cherry lips, that made her quite bewitching, as she lay half fainting on Bothwell's breast and half embraced by him, listening to his oft-repeated, and perhaps too voluble, vows of

constancy and love.

"Farewell, dear Norway—a long farewell!" she exclaimed, kissing her hand with playful sadness to the distant stripe of blue that shewed where her native hills were fading far astern. "I may no more hear the rush of thy waterfalls, or see thy pine-clad hills, and deep salt fiords, overhung by the sweetbrier and purple lilac that scent their waters in summer, or the silver birch and dark-green pine that shadow them in autumn and in whiter; but oh! *Gammle Norgé*, I never will forget thee!"

"Anna," said the Earl, "from the ramparts of my castle of Bothwell, I will shew thee a valley of the Clyde, and such a territory as no lord in all Scandinavia could shew his bride; and bethink thee, that hold of Bothwell is thrice more magnificent than Frederick's castle of Elsineur. I have eight stately fortresses, the least of which would make four of yonder castle of Bergen; I have four lordships, each of which is richer than your native province of Aggerhuis; and I have four sheriffdoms, each of which is worth three of it—and thou shalt be lady of them all! When I wind this horn from Bothwell castle gate, it finds so ready an echo at the tower of Lawhope, the house of Clelland, the keep of Orbiestoun, and the place of Calder, that five thousand men, all dight for battle, are in their stirrups, and a hundred knights, the best in Scotland, are proud to unfurl their pennons beneath the banner of James Hepburn of Hailes!"

The Earl's eyes sparkled with enthusiasm, and those of Anna lit up with delight and pride; while Ormiston, who considered himself the representative of these hundred good palladia, adjusted his ruff complacently, and drew himself to the full extent of his six feet odd inches.

"And," whispered Anna, "and will you always love me as you do now?"

"O yes—ever and always!" replied the impassioned lover.

Ormiston whistled dubiously, and then continued his ditty—

"The Frog cam to the Myll doore,
 And a low bow made he, O!
 Saying, 'Gie, Sir Miller, a scrap o' thy store
 To a Frog of gentle degree, O!"

CHAPTER XII. THE ISLE OF WESTERAY.

'Tis evening quick;—'tis night:—the rain
 Is towing wide the fruitless main;
 Thick, thick;—no sight remains the while
 From the farthest Orkeny Isle,
 No sight to seahorse or to seer,
 But of a little pallid sail
 That seems as if 'twould straggle near.

Leigh Hunt.

The course of the Earl's ship lay westward; but heavy gales blew her far to the north, and for many days she beat about in that tempestuous ocean which roars around the hundred Isles of Shetland, pouring its foam upon their bluff precipices and into the vast and resounding caverns that perforate their stern shores, many of which have never seen other inhabitants than the gigantic erne that built its nest in the cliffs, the wild horse that browsed on the moor, and the whiskered walrus that basked on the beach below.

On others lie the rude towers and dwellings of the hardy Udallers, the ruined forts and runic tombs of those old ocean kings, who were so long the terror of Britain, of Belgium, and of Gaul—the temples of the Druids, the uncouth crosses and gothic chapels of that later creed which Columba preached, and for which Saint Erick died—and the obelisks that mark the lonely graves of the old Kuldei overlook the reedy moors, the foaming maelstroms, and the rushing surges of the Ultima Thule.

For fourteen days dark grey clouds had overhung that struggling ship. The sullenness of the sailors at the continuance of an adverse wind was communicated to the Earl, who became petulant; for Anna and her attendant were very unwell, and nothing cures love so much as a dose of sea-sickness. On the fifteenth day the sun rose brightly from the ocean, and tipped with light the dreary hills of Unst; the clouds dispersed, a fair wind swept over the water, and the *Fleur-de-lys* bore away merrily for Westeray, an isle of Innistore, where stood the stronghold of Noltland, possessed by one of Bothwell's chief friends and adherents, Sir Gilbert Balfour, a powerful baron, and cadet of the house of Monkquhanny, in Fifeshire.

Anna, we have said, was very sick and sorrowful. The Earl scarcely left the side of her couch in the little tapestried cabin; and though in her pallor and helplessness she was as beautiful as ever, the Magister Absalom records, in his stiff, dry way, that Bothwell could not resist the bitter and obtruding reflection, that it might have been better (considering the turn of fortune in his favour at home) if his vessel had not been driven into the harbour of Bergen, on the night

in which this history opened.

In their bud he endeavoured to crush these ungenerous and ungrateful thoughts; but they recurred to him again and again, till one glance of Anna's pleading eyes, one smile of her pretty mouth, would put them all to flight, and he felt that he could brave both Huntly and the queen for her sake. Yet whenever he was alone, or beyond the immediate influence of her charms, ambition, as of old, began to whisper in his ear and to gnaw at his heart; pride and self-interest were on one hand—love and generosity on the other.

The first flush of love was over.

Though he did not as yet entirely repent his strange espousal of this fair northern girl, he foresaw that it would prove a formidable barrier to his gaining any permanent ascendancy over the faction of Moray and Morton, as the principal strength of the Catholic lords consisted in their unanimity, which was certain of being at an end, whenever Huntly learned how Bothwell had broken his promise to his sister, Lady Jane Gordon.

Ormiston had mentally been making similar reflections; and when a dark cloud gathered on the broad and noble brow of Bothwell, or an expression of deep meditation veiled the brightness of his fine dark eyes, he knew well what visions were struggling for mastery in his bold and ambitious heart. But the knight never intruded a remark of his own; and remembering how often, when in the full glow of his new amour, the Earl had so scornfully rejected his more sage advice, he resolved quietly to let fate have its own way.

At the close of a stormy day, the isle of Westeray, like a dark blue cloud, arose from ocean on their lee. Dark and louring, the sky communicated its inky hue to the sea, which was flecked by spots of white, that marked the crests of the waves. Like snow, their surf was poured upon the jutting rocks and hidden reefs that fringe the island; and thus, when night closed in, a white line of breakers alone indicated where it lay.

As the sun set, his sickly rays poured a yellow light along the waste of waters, and lit up with a parting gleam the gigantic façade of the castle of Noltland, which towered above the rocks of Westeray, with its heavy battlements and tourelles at the angles, its broad chimneys and stone-flagged tophouses gleaming redly and duskily against the murky sky beyond. The light faded away from its casements, one by one they grew dark, and an hour after the sun had set, the *Fleur-de-lys* anchored on that side of the isle which is sheltered from the waves of the Atlantic.

Joyously the Earl and his companions sprang upon the rude pier, alongside of which their vessel was hauled after great labour, and much swearing and vociferation by the seamen. The night was now intensely black, but the darkness of the beach was partially dispelled by the blaze of ten or twelve torches, which

were upheld by the retainers of the Baron of Noltland, who hastened to the pier to receive the Earl.

Sir Gilbert Balfour of Westera, who, to the office of master of the household to Queen Mary, united the captaincy of the royal castle of Kirkwall, was a man above the middle height, strongly made, powerfully limbed, and well browned by constant exposure to the weather. His hair and beard, which were trimmed very short, were of the deepest black. He was richly attired in a doublet of yellow satin, embroidered with Venetian gold; a scarlet mantle lined with white silk hung from his left shoulder, and a small ruff fringed the top of a bright steel gorget that encircled his neck. His bonnet and trunk-hose were of black velvet. He carried a walking-cane, but was without other arms than one of those long daggers such as were then made at the Bowhead of Edinburgh. The magnificence of his attire, which glittered in the torchlight, contrasted forcibly with that of his islesmen who crowded about him.

Four or five, who seemed to act as a bodyguard, wore iron helmets adorned with eagles' feathers, coats-of-mail composed of minute rings of steel linked together, and reaching nearly to their ankles. They carried battle-axes and short but powerful handbows slung on their backs, and crossed saltirewise by sheafs of barbed arrows. Others were clad in sealskin doublets, with plaids of purple and blue check, and kilts of dark-brown stuff; but all were barefooted, barelegged, and barearmed—strong, muscular, red-haired, and savage-looking men—whose hazel eyes glistened through their matted locks in the light of the streaming torches.

"Noble Bothwell—welcome to Westera!" exclaimed Sir Gilbert, vailing his bonnet. "I knew thy banner at a mile distant, when it glittered in that brief blink of sunshine. Ha! stout Ormiston, I have not seen thee since the day we fought side by side at the battle of Corrichie! Welcome home!"

"Balfour, I thank thee!" said Ormiston; "but dost thou call this home? By Jove! I deem that we have many a long Scottish mile to travel yet, ere we find ourselves under our own rafters."

"And if the same mischances attend me," said Bothwell, "I may cruise about in these northern seas like another Ulysses, but without acquiring his wisdom. However, I have brought my Calypso with me. Ha! ha! now I warrant, my trusty Gib Balfour, thou hast never read of this same Sir Ulysses!"

"Read! St. Mary forefend! though my brother, the Lord President, hath compiled a notable book of 'Practiques,' I never could read nor write either, praise God! and by his aid never shall. I can bite the pen and make my mark, in sign of the blessed cross, like my father, the stout knight of Monkquhanny, before me. Of what service are booklear or scholar-craft to a knight or gentleman of coat-armour? Nay, pshaw! I leave all such to monks and scribes—to knaves and notaries—and content me with the knowledge of arms, stable-craft, and falconrie,

siclike as becometh me; but this Sir Ulysses—what manner of knight was he? came he from the Mearns or the west country?"

"A wise warrior he was, who fought valiantly at Troy, and he loved an enchantress such as I have with me now."

"Thou, my lord!"

"Ay, in yonder vessel."

"A sorceress—God forebode!" said Balfour, stepping back a pace; "we must have her burnt! The sheriff court of Kirkwall meets at Lammas-tide. 'Tis well!" Bothwell laughed.

"Thou mistakest me, honest Balfour! The enchantress I mean, is a fair girl whom I have brought with me from Norway, and who deals in no spells save such as win the heart. She is a lady of high birth and rare beauty too; so brush up thy rusty chivalry, Sir Gilbert, and let me have a litter forthwith for her conveyance."

"A lady! forsooth such brittle ware will find but rough accommodation among us isles-men here at Noltland, where a silken kirtle hath not been seen these ten good years, ha! ha!"

At that moment, Anna, supported by Ormiston and Christina her attendant, appeared at the side of the vessel, about to cross a broad plank that extended to the rough wooden pier, overlooked by the great donjon tower of Noltland. She was very pale; but the torchlight shed a tinge of red on her cheek, and caused her heavy locks to glitter as the night wind waved them to and fro.

The plank shook, and a half-stifled cry of fear escaped from Anna. Bothwell advanced to her assistance, but at the instant a young man sprang from the crowd of islesmen behind Sir Gilbert Balfour, dropped into the water, seized the plank with both hands to steady it, while presenting his shoulder for the lady to lean on.

She touched it lightly with her hand, and murmured her thanks as she passed.

A low sigh fell upon her ear; and, with that quick apprehension of sorrow and interest which is so characteristic of women, Anna turned to her supporter, but his face was bent down and concealed, and she felt agitated—she knew not why.

The young man trembled so much that he almost sank when she touched him. He looked up once; there was a rustling of satin—a dreamy sense of perfume and starched lace, and the vision passed away. He was Konrad!

Ah! had Anna seen the deep and earnest, the sorrowful and affectionate expression that lit his soft and upturned eyes, her heart would assuredly have smote her; but the splendid Earl of Bothwell seized her hand, and led her towards Sir Gilbert Balfour, by whom she was hurried away.

Lighted by torches that streamed and sputtered in the night wind, and

flared on the rugged rocks that reared from the frothy ocean, the group ascended the narrow and winding pathway that led to the castle. Konrad gazed wistfully after them, with his hands pressed upon his forehead, and with the air of one who struggles to preserve his senses.

When drifting about at the sport of the waves of the Christiana fiord, and almost insensible from cold and misery, he had been picked up by a small galliot bound for Kirkwall, and the crew had landed him in Westeray a week before the arrival of Bothwell.

He had been protected by Balfour, who, being kind-hearted and hospitable, felt interested in the young man on witnessing the dejection and utter prostration of spirit under which he laboured.

The despair of a heart that has loved truly, and been deceived, is sometimes so deep that no one can imagine its intensity. So it was with Konrad.

The deep, dark consciousness of desolation that had been settling over him, might have become in time a more subdued and morbid feeling of regret; but now this sudden meeting brought back all his first hopes and emotions to their starting-place, and renewed in poignancy all the agony of that hour, in which he learned that he had lost her for ever.

CHAPTER XIII. NOLTLAND.

The nicht followis, and every weary wicht
Throwout the Erde has caught anone richt,
The sound pesund slepe them liket beat
Woddis and rayeand sels war at rest.
And the Sterne, thair myd coursis rollis down,
All the fieldis still othir, but noyis or soun.

The Æneid of Douglas, 1518.

The long twilight of the northern eve had passed away, and the darkness of an October night had closed over Westeray.

Tall and grim and dark, save where lit by an occasional ray from a window, the Keep of Noltland towered in massive outline above the rocky isle.

This magnificent castle was built by Thomas de Tulloch, bishop and gov-

ernor of Orkney under Erick king of Denmark, about 1422. It was surrounded by massive walls and outworks; the sides of the great keep were perforated by a series of loopholes for quarrelles or cannon, rising tier above tier like the gun-ports of a line-of-battle ship. Many parts of this vast baronial hold are richly decorated by the skill and fancy of the architect, whom tradition avers to have found his grave within its walls, and a large stone, shaped like a coffin, is still pointed out at the foot of the great staircase, as covering the place of his last repose.

The stately hall of the Bishop's castle glowed cheerfully in the blaze of the fire that crackled in the arched fireplace, where a pile of driftwood blazed, the fragments of old wrecks that, could they have spoken, might have told many a tale of suffering and of war, with logs of resinous pine brought from Norway, or washed on the beach from the savage and then unknown coasts of the Labrador.

From the roof hung a large brazen chandelier, in which the flames of twelve tall candles were streaming in the currents of air that swept through the vast apartment. The floor was paved with stone, which, though originally of red rock like the walls, was carefully whitened and sanded. The great oak gurnels and cabinets, the tables and chairs, were all of the fashion of James III.; and behind them, on rusty tenterhooks, hung long pieces of rude and carpet-like tapestry, representing, in dark and gigantic figures, the voyage of Æneas, and other passages from Virgil. As the wind moved the arras, the great mishapen figure of the pious Trojan, his long-haired Creusa and chubby Ascanius, seemed at times as if starting into life. At the lower end of the hall, and almost lost in the shadow of its vast vacuity, were several retainers of Westeray, clad in their mail shirts and brown kilts, lolling on hard wooden settles, conversing in guttural whispers, or sleeping under the side tables rolled up in their plaids, looking like bundles of tartan with a mop stick through them—the latter being represented by their shock heads of hair.

A trivet table, marked with a diagram for playing the old chivalric game of Troy, was placed near the fire, and thereon lay cards and dice, and a tall pewter tankard of malmsey wine, from which the silver-mounted horns were incessantly replenished by Bothwell, Ormiston, and the Knight of Noltland, who, with their doublets unbuttoned and their gorgets and swordbelts flung aside were lounging by the ruddy fire and conversing with animation, but marked by a gravity rather unusual for the two first-named personages.

Anna, who, with her attendant, had been conducted to suitable apartments, had retired for the night, leaving Bothwell and his friends to pursue their political conversation, and to drink their wine undisturbed, which they did with the devotion of three Germans quaffing for a wager.

"And this is all thou knowest of the machinations of Moray? Ah! false bastard, I shall live to mar thee yet!" exclaimed the Earl, with kindling eyes, on

hearing Balfour unfold the web of intrigue that surrounded the young Queen Mary. "And my barony of Crichtoun too! saidst thou, Sir Gilbert, that Morton had cast his gloating eyes on that?"

"Yea, and but for this late raid at Holyrood, had added it to his adjacent fiefs of Dalkeith and Vogrie."

"And so they have slain this Rizzio! I remember him well—a smooth-tongued old Italian, somewhat gay in his garb, but crooked in form, and weasoned in visage. Did he not succeed Monsieur Raulet as foreign secretary?"

"The same."

"And they slew him, poor knave!"

"It was on the evening of the 9th of March last, when the Queen's Grace sat at supper with her sister, the Countess Jane of Argyle, and Rizzio seated between their tabourettes twangling on his ghittern, when the High Chancellor seized the palace gates at the head of a hundred and fifty tall spearmen, in corselets and steel bonnets, while my Lords of Lindesay and Ruthven, with King Henry and a hundred more, in their armour, ascended by the secret stair to the turret chamber in James V's tower. The poor Italian skipped about like a maukin, and cried aloud in his native gibberish for mercy; but, by the mass! he found little of that, for they dragged him from the skirt of the shrieking Queen, and slew him within earshot of her Majesty, whom Andrew Kerr"—

"Of Fawdounside?" said Ormiston; "a stout man, and a bold—I know tall Andrew well."

"Is said to have handled somewhat roughly, for he bent a cocked pistolette against her breast."

"Of Mary?—of a woman about to become a mother!" said the Earl, grasping his poniard. "Would to St. Paul I had been within arm's length of him! but what hath drawn the ire of his most sapient Majesty and the Protestant Lords upon this poor Italian?"

"Heaven alone knoweth,[*] unless it be that her Majesty favoured him greatly for his superior scholarcraft; which, like witchcraft and every other craft, is often like unto a sharp sword that cutteth its own scabbard. Royal favour, as thou well knowest, Bothwell, will soon make a man hated by his compeers; and thus Rizzio was hated, and so slain, for they left him in the adjoining chamber, gashed by six-and-fifty sword and dagger wounds, with the King's poniard driven to the hilt in his brisket, to show by whose mandate the deed was done."

[*] At this date, the calumnies recorded by Buchanan were yet uncirculated. H. le Guyon and *Blackwood* expressly state David Rizzio to have been an *old man*.

”’Twas right Venetian that.”

”And further, knowest thou that Master Craig, the minister of St. Giles, that Master Knox, and the father of that buxom bride whom he won by his damnable sorceries—even the pious and godly lord of Ochiltree—are all art and part in the assassination of this poor stranger, whom they deemed their only barrier to the ear and eye of her Majesty?”

”How!” said Bothwell ironically, ”darest thou thus malign our Scottish apostles?”

”Nay, I malign none; but this is well known to my brother the President, who, as thou art aware, is ever fishing in troubled waters, that they were in the conspiracy. Ha!” he added, with a dark frown, ”thinkest thou that this knave Knox, who leagued with the sacrilegious murderers of my kinsman, the great Cardinal of St. Stephen, would quail at crushing this harmless bookworm—this poor Italian violer? I trow not!”

”’Tis nothing to me,” replied the Earl; ”for Master Knox was never friend of mine.”

”Nor mine!” added Ormiston, with a furious oath; ”he ever gave me the breadth of the causeway, as if there was contamination in the touch of my cloak; and so he, too, can league with murderers—with jackmen, and men-at-arms, eh?”

”Doubtless,” replied Balfour with a sneer, ”when, as he hath it, ’God raiseth them up to slay those whom the kirk hateth;’ since Rizzio’s death, Morton, Lindsay, Ochiltree, Fawdounside, and others, have been exiles in England; the Catholic lords are again in the ascendant, and want but the appearance of Huntly and yourself at court (united by other ties, as I have no doubt you soon will be,) to crush by the strong hand, and perhaps for ever, those dark and dour-visaged Protestants. God’s murrain on their long prayers and Geneva cloaks! for the sound of one and sight of the other, gives me a fit of the spleen. But we have had enough of these matters—fill thy wine-bicker, noble Bothwell; here’s to black-eyed Jane of Huntly—drink, Ormiston, a fair carouse to the Lady of Hailes and Bothwell-hall!”

The Earl drank his wine in silence, and black Hob did so too, twirling his mustache the while, with his eyes half-closed by a leer.

”Odsbody! thou receivest this sentiment rather coldly!” said Sir Gilbert, setting down his horn with surprise.

”Thou forgettest there is this lady of Norway,” said the Earl.

”By St. Magnus! dost thou speak of letting thy gay lemane stand in the way of thine advancement, to an eminence more glorious than ever Scottish subject (save this lordling of Lennox) attained to; for thou and Huntly shall govern the realm, and the King and Queen will be but as painted puppets in thy hands; for the memory of Rizzio’s bloody corpse, and that night of horror in the turret-chamber,

will ever rise in Mary's mind as a barrier between thee and the exiles. Bethink thee! Thou hast many a wrong to revenge on the tribe that have triumphed in thine absence."

"True, true," replied Bothwell, with a lowering eye; "but I have promised to this girl"—

"Not marriage! thou wouldst not say that," laughed Sir Gilbert. "No, no; thou wouldst not be such a jack-a-lent (the blood rushed to the Earl's brow). But if thou fearest that Jane Gordon should hear of thy wandering fancies, why, bethink thee that Noltland is a strong castle, and that the rocks of this islet are washed by the deep salt sea. It would form a prison for the giants of Amadis, then how much more for one poor fragile girl?"

Whatever Bothwell thought of this insidious advice, or how much it coincided with the ideas that were then beginning to obtrude on his mind, we shall not say, but now return to Konrad.

He sat by the lonely shore, and its waves rolled up the shelving rock to his feet. He was in a waking dream, and felt neither the cold night wind or the misty spray of the sea as they blew on his fevered cheek. A sense of desolation pressed heavily on his heart, and it was not unmingled with a desire of vengeance on Bothwell. But Konrad was alike brave and generous, and the sentiments of jealousy and rage, that made him at one time grip the haft of his Norwegian knife, were almost immediately stilled by those of a gentler nature—pity and commiseration.

He now felt both for Anna, and felt acutely, though she had so heedlessly and ruthlessly cast him from her heart and remembrance. Chance had thrown them together on a foreign shore, and feeling, he knew not why, an intense distrust of the sincerity of that gay and glittering noble, whom she had preferred to an earlier and better lover, he resolved to watch over her safety and interests in secrecy, and with the affection of a friend; for he now deemed her no longer worthy of a deeper sentiment of regard—and yet withal he felt that he loved her still—yea passionately, as of old, though hope was dead for ever.

The moon arose at the distant horizon, and cold and pale its light fell on the restless ocean; clearly and brightly the stars sparkled in the dark blue sky, and at times the red wavering streamers of the north shot across it.

High and grim in all its baronial pride and feudal strength, the embattled keep of the Scottish stronghold towered above the slimy rocks—slimy with drifting spray and drenched seaweed. Three long flakes of yellow lustre streamed out into the night from the grated windows of the hall. One starlike ray shone from a chamber in the guest-row, and long and wistfully Konrad gazed at it, for he believed it was the apartment of Anna, and his conjecture was right.

Young and enthusiastic, he felt that many a vision of future fame and hap-

piness had perished now, and passed away for ever, with the passion that had cherished such dreams—dreams that arise only in the noon of life and love.

The moon went down into the dark blue ocean; the diamond stars faded one by one, and the first rays of the early morning began to play upon the floating clouds, to tinge the east with orange hues, and tip the turrets of Noltland with warm light; but Konrad was still seated by the murmuring sea.

All sense of time and place had been forgotten, or were merged in one idea. And that idea was Anna.

CHAPTER XIV. THE SEPARATION.

Why no tender word at parting—
 Why no kiss, no farewell take?
 Would that I could but forget thee—
 Would this throbbing heart might break!
 Is my face no longer blooming?
 Are my eyes no longer bright?
 Ah! my tears have made them dimmer,
 And my cheeks are pale and white.
Edmonstoune-Aytoun.

"I have resolved!" exclaimed the Earl, breaking a long silence, as he walked to and fro with Ormiston on the bartisan of Noltland next morning. "With a prospect before me so magnificent—the attainment of the administration, the civil and military power on one hand, the sweets of successful rivalry and vengeance on the other! Oh! I would be worse than mad to forego it, by marring my union with the sister of Huntly, and for what? This love so suddenly conceived, and for a foreign girl!"

"Cocknails! but now thou speakest like a man of mettle!" growled Hob through his coal-black beard.

"If," said the Earl musingly; "if I could love her as I once loved one who—pshaw! why these old thoughts? Anna is not my first love; and have I not felt how feeble, how falling, how sickly, have been the sentiments entertained for all who have succeeded *her*?"

"Then thou wilt sail"—

"From Westeray; and, like Æneas, leaving my Dido behind me."

"Right! Sir Gilbert shewed me letters from Lethington the secretary, and his brother Sir James of Pittendriech, wherein they state that her Majesty is most anxious for your return, and daily groweth more weary of her husband; that Huntly (the moment thou art fairly espoused to his sister) will strike some vigorous blow to lay for ever prostrate the adherents of Morton and of Moray."

"What a jack-a-lent! what a blockhead I have been, to give way thus to my passion for the niece of Rosenkrantz! I have done myself, and so may mar a thousand giant schemes of triumph and ambition."

"I thought that sense would return when perhaps too late; but the affair is not irredeemable."

"Ha!—how?"

"A marriage tie blessed by yon mad priest cannot be very indissoluble, and the damsel may easily be got rid of."

"Dog of hell!" exclaimed the Earl furiously, "wouldst thou counsel me to murder her?"

"Nay," replied Hob sternly; "may God forgive thee the thought, so freely as I do this foul offence; but as Sir Gilbert offers to keep thy troublesome lemane, let him do so a-God's name. He is a gay man and a gallant, this old Balfour—we know him well; and, cock and pie! I warrant he will soon find means to turn this damsel's sorrow into joy."

At this probability a darker frown gathered on the brow of Bothwell; for, though half tired of Anna, and wholly repenting of his intrigue with her, he felt a pang at the idea of another supplanting his image in her heart.

"Thou art but a cold-blooded and iron-hearted mosstrooper, Hob," said he; "one inured to rapine and cruelty; nursled and nurtured among wilds and morasses, and thirty years of incessant feud and foray, stouthrief and bloodshed, and cannot judge of my feelings in this matter. I will myself see Anna, and break the matter to her—bid her adieu, and will meet thee here, if thou tarriest for me."

"See her, and be lost! one smile—one tender word—a few tears—will seal thy fate; and while thou playest the lover and the laggard here at Westeray, Morton, Lindsay, and their allies, aided by the English Queen, regain place and power, and reverse thy pardon and recall. Yonder lieth the *Fleur-de-lys*, with her canvass flapping in the friendly gale, that streams her pennons towards the Caithness coast. Be wise—be wary; away, and see not Anna again!"

"Trust me, Ormiston. In my youth I was the plaything of a proud, a cold, and calculating beauty; the slave of her charms and caprice in hall and bower—the upholder of her name and loveliness amid the dust and blood of the battle and tiltyard; but these follies have passed with the years and the passion that

produced them; and now thou shalt see, that, like that woman, I can be cold as ice, and impassible as marble, when my interest jars with my love. In half an hour I will meet thee here; till then, adieu!"

One of the numerous boys, who fed like the dogs on the offals at the hall-table of the great island baron, conducted the Earl to the chamber of Anna. He was little, but strong and active as a deer. His whole attire was a kilt of brown stuff belted about him, a sealskin vest, and the leathern fillet confining the masses of his thick red hair, which, from the hour of his birth, a comb had never touched. Leading the way, he sprang like a squirrel up the steps of the great stair, his bare and sinewy legs taking three steps at a time.

The space and magnificence of the staircase made the Earl pause as he ascended, notwithstanding the bitter thoughts that oppressed him. The great stone column upon which the steps turn, is a yard in diameter, and has a capital decorated with a statue of the Bishop of Orkney, Thomas de Tulloch. The nature of the times of which we write, was evinced by the architecture of this grand stair; for, at every turn of the ascent, there are concealed loopholes pointing inwards, to gall the foe who might penetrate thus far; while, at the summit, there is still remaining the guard-room, where five or six islesmen, who formed the body-guard of Balfour, clad in their shirts of mail, and armed with bow and battle-axe, lay stretched on the stone benches dozing listlessly, like sleepy dogs.

The Earl stood within the apartment where Anna had passed the night; it was wainscoted with fir-wood, and on the centre of each pannel was carved a quaint device, the design of some rude genius of the Orcadian Isles. These were principally of a religious nature, and the hands and feet of our Saviour, pierced by the nail-holes and encircled by a crown of thorns, appeared alternately with the *otter-head* of Balfour, and satyr-like visages that grinned from bunches of gothic leaves. The stone fireplace was surmounted by a bishop's mitre, and a fire of driftwood was still smouldering on the hearth.

Christina, who had been watching her mistress, retired on the entrance of the Earl.

He approached the bed where Anna, still oppressed by the illness and lassitude consequent to her voyage, was reposing and slumbering soundly, unaware that her lover was bending over her.

Raised upon a dais, and having a heavy wooden canopy supported by four grotesque columns, the bed resembled a gothic tomb rather than a couch, and Anna might have passed for a statue, as her face and bosom were white as Parian marble. On each cheek her hair fell in heavy braids, which glowed like bars of gold when the rays of the morning sun streamed through the embrasured casement on her placid face.

More than usual was revealed of a bosom that, in its whiteness and round-

ness, was, like that face, surpassing beautiful. The colour came and went in the cheek of the Earl, and he became irresolute as he gazed upon her. He sighed deeply, and, animated by a sudden tenderness, pressed his lip to her cheek; she awoke, and twined her arms around him.

"My dear Lord!" said she, in a faint voice, "so thou art come to me again!"

"I have come, Anna, but to bid thee farewell." Her large eyes dilated with sudden alarm and grief.

"I told thee, Anna, that in Orkney we might have to separate for a time, ere I could convey thee to my household and my home. The wind is blowing right across the stormy Frith toward the mainland of Scotland, and though love cries ho! my skipper is urgent, and still more so is stern necessity. Farewell for a time—for a brief time, sweet Anna, I must leave thee," continued the Earl kissing her repeatedly to pacify her.

Her beauty was very alluring, and until that moment he knew not how deep was his passion for her.

"In that busy world of turmoil and intrigue on which thou art about to re-enter—I will be forgotten. Thou mayest not return to me, and I—I will"—

"What?"

"Die!"

"Speak not, think not thus, dearest Anna!" replied Bothwell, who felt his resolution wavering, though the thoughts of ambition and the taunts of Ormiston urged him on the path he had commenced. "We must separate—but we must meet again."

"Well, be it so!" she said, bending her eyes that were blinded with tears upon him; "but O, Bothwell! thou art dearer to me than life, and knowest all that I have sacrificed for thee,—home—friends—myself—every thing"—

"True—true, Anna;" he was touched to the soul by her manner and accent.

"Then leave me not—but take me with thee. I will go happily in the meanest disguise thou mayest assign me—O, I will never be discovered!"

"It may not be, Anna; it is impossible. By St. Paul! I tell thee it is impossible at present."

"In the confidence of thy love I have been dreaming a pleasant dream, and now perhaps am waking from it. Wilt thou love me in thine absence as thou dost now?"

"After my solemn espousal of thee before that holy hermit—canst thou doubt it?" rejoined the Earl, in a voice that faltered with very shame, though to Anna it seemed that grief had rendered it tremulous in tone. The supposed emotion inspired her with sudden confidence in him, and she said—

"Go—and never again will I suspect thy love; but oh! when wilt thou return to me?"

"By Yule-tide, dear Anna, if I am in life;" and, kissing her once again, he hurried from her presence like one who had been guilty of a crime, and—returned no more!

"Oh! how base, how ignoble is this duplicity!" he exclaimed on rejoining Hob Ormiston, who with folded arms had been leaning on the parapet, whistling the "Hunts of Cheviot" to wile away the time. "She weeps so bitterly at my departure, and speaks so trustingly of my return, that my heart is wrung with the misery my damnable deceit and criminal ambition will bring upon her."

"Whew! yet she cared not to deceive one who loved her earlier, longer, and better than thee."

"True," replied the Earl; he became silent for a moment, and while the idea of her ever having loved another caused a pang of mortification in his breast, it was mingled with a coldness from which he drew a consolation for the part he was about to act.

"By cock and pie!" continued Hob, pursuing the advantage his sophistry had gained; "ten thousand women should never stand in my path. I never pursued love so fast as to lose a stirrup by the way; and what the foul fiend matters it whether thou weddest Jane Gordon or not? Thou canst still come and see thy Norwegian sometimes, and I warrant ye Sir Gilbert will prevent her from feeling thine absence much. He is a courtier of jolly King James the Fifth; and he, as thou knowest, kept a dame at every hunting lodge to manage the household. Ha! nay, nay, do not chafe; 'tis but marrying the Lady Jane, and handfasting the Lady Anna; and methinks I need not cite examples among our nobility and knighthood."

"In the days when I was young, generous, and unspotted in honour and faith, I was alternately the tool and the plaything of a woman, of that female fiend, Catherine of Medicis, who saw my love for—pshaw! since then I have grown wiser. I have, as we say at chess, turned the tables upon the sex, and view them merely as the objects of my pleasure—the tools of my ambition. Yet I feel that I am on the eve of taking a step, that, however cruel, must make or mar my fortune."

"Fortune! defy her, and the fickle jade will favour thee. I love a bold fellow, who, with his helmet on his brow and a whinger by his side, becomes the artificer of his own fortune."

"Ah! could we but have a glimpse through that thick veil that ever involves the future. Hast thou ever read Cicero?"

"Nay, thank God! I never could read aught save my missal, and, without spelling, very little of that; but since 1560, when missal and mass went out of fashion together, I have done nothing in that way. But this book"—

"'Tis a man, Marcus Tullius Cicero, an illustrious Roman."

"A sorcerer, by his name, I doubt not; well, and what said he?"

"There is a fine passage in his works, wherein he speaks of the capability of seeing effects in their *causes*; and supposes that Priam, and Pompey, and Cæsar, had each laid before them their pages in the great book of fate, in the noonday of their prosperity—ere the first fell with his Troy, ere the second was defeated at Pharsalia, and the third perished by the dagger of Brutus. But I warrant thou canst not fathom this."

"No—an it had been a winepot I might; but, cock and pie! 'tis all Greek to me. See! yonder cometh Sir Gilbert from the shore to announce that our ship is ready; and so, once more, my Lord, let us seaward, ho!"

The sun was setting that evening on the Firth of Westeray. Its impetuous waves, that rolled in saffron and purple, broke in golden breakers crested with silver surf upon the shining rocks. The distant peaks of Rousay were bathed in yellow light, but, mellowed by distance, the sea lay cold and blue around their bases. The sky was clear and cloudless, and the purity of the atmosphere imparted many beautiful tints to the ocean, that rolled its restless tides around these lonely isles. Like a white bird floating on the distant azure, afar off at the horizon's verge, a sail was visible from the keep of Noltland about sunset. It was the *Fleur-de-Lys*, that had borne Bothwell away from the arms of Anna Rosenkrantz. The whole day, with tear-swollen eyes, she had watched its course through the Firth of Westeray; now it had diminished to a speck in the distance, and ere the sun dipped into the Atlantic, had disappeared behind the fertile Isle of Eglise-oy, where then, as now, the pyramidal spire of the chapel of Saint Magnus rose above the verdant holms, as a landmark to the fishers of the isles.

As slowly the sail vanished round that dim and distant promontory, a low cry almost of despair burst from Anna, and she clung to the weeping Christina. The waiting-woman wept from mere sympathy; but the grief of her mistress (sudden, like all her impulses) was of that violent kind which can only find relief in tears and loud ejaculations.

Near her stood one of Sir Gilbert's retainers, clad in a long shirt of mail, such as was then common in the Orcades; he was leaning on his long axe, and regarding her attentively through the horizontal slit in his *salade*, a species of helmet with an immovable visor which completely concealed the face; but beneath the impassible front of that iron casque, were features distorted by the grief and anguish that wrung the wearer's generous heart. He was Konrad, who, thus disguised, had the mortification of beholding the wildness of her grief for another.

Often he made a motion, as if to approach her, and as often retired; for though on one hand the most sincere pity urged him to comfort her, the invidious whispers of anger and disdain on the other, together with the necessity

of preserving his incognito, withheld him. And there, scarcely a lance's length apart, were the lover and his idol, with the night descending on their sorrows.

From Rousay's hills, and on the distant sea, the sunlight died away. The Firth of Westeray turned from saffron to purple, and from purple to the darkest blue, in whose vast depths were reflected the star-studded firmament, till the moon arose, and then once more its waters rolled in light of the purest silver; and each breaker, as its impetuous wrath was poured upon the bluffs of basalt, fell back into the ocean a shower of brilliants.

CHAPTER XV. DOUBT AND DESPAIR.

Antony ————— How I loved,
Witness ye nights and days, and all ye hours
That danced away with down upon your feet,
As all your business were to count my passion.
All for Love, or the World well lost.

Yule-tide came—and passed away.

Three months rolled on, and in that time Anna heard no tidings of Bothwell.

Those who, like her, have waited in all the agony of anxiety and love, degenerating into fear and doubt, can alone know how long those weary months appeared.

In that lonely island her amusements were few. Kind-hearted, honest, and bluff in manner, Sir Gilbert Balfour, though having been something of a courtier in his youth, had gradually acquired much of that rude austerity, with which the Reformation had impressed the manners of the Scottish people, and, being unable to converse with his fair prisoner either in French or Norse, he soon abandoned in despair any attempts to soothe her melancholy, either by signs or condolences offered in the Scottish tongue, which was quite unknown to her.

She soon grew tired of watching the sails that now and then appeared in the narrow strait between Rousay and Westeray. At first she had been wont to hail them with delight, and to watch their approach with a beating heart, full of hope that each successive one might be his returning to her; but hope and exultation died away together, when the ship passed on towards her Scandinavian home;

and then she thought of old Sir Erick Rosenkrantz, sitting lonely in his hall at Bergen; and bitter were the tears she wept, at the memory of that kind old face she might never behold again.

The walrus and the sea-dog, that at times arose in droves from the waves, with their round heads breasting the foam; the vast whale that floundered in the shallows, and blew clouds of water in the air; the shoals of finless porpoises, that rushed through the surge like a flock of ocean devils, failed, after a time, to interest or amuse her. Week succeeded week;—there were days of storm, when the grey clouds and the white mists came down from the Arctic circle; when the waves roared and foamed through the narrow strait, and the lightning flashed afar off among the heath-clad hills of Rousay—days of cloudless sunshine, or of listless calm, succeeded each other; and nothing marked the time, which passed by unmarked, even as the wind that swept over the pathless ocean,—but there came no word of Bothwell. The spring of 1566 approached, and all hope in the bosom of Anna began to die away.

Konrad still preserved his incognito most rigidly; but though life seemed to stagnate on the little Isle of Westeray, and in its great but dreary baronial castle, the world beyond it was busy as ever. One night a messenger arrived from the lieutenant-governor of Kirkwall, bearing despatches for Sir Gilbert, who, without taking leave of Anna, but merely giving strict orders to his bailie, that "she was to be kept in sure ward, and treated with every respect," had thrown himself on board a small crayer, and sailed for the mainland of Orkney.

Then passing fishermen brought rumours of civil war and bloodshed—of battles fought and castles stormed; and Anna, when she heard the name of Bothwell, looked anxiously in the faces of those around her, to read in their expression those tidings she was dying with eagerness to learn, but which it was impossible for her to gather from the barbarous, and half Gaelic half Pictish, jargon of the speakers.

The festival of Easter passed away—summer drew on; yet Bothwell did not come, and then the heart of poor Anna began to sicken within her.

The evening was declining drearily, as many others had declined, on West-eray.

A prey to the deepest dejection, Anna reclined on a stone seat in an angle of the battlement, through an embrasure of which she was watching the setting sun. Christina sat near her on the steps of this stone sofa, and her eyes were anxiously fixed on the pallid face of her mistress, whose fine but humid eyes were bent on the distant horizon; but their expression was dreamy, sad, and vacant. The eyes of another were fixed on her, with an intensity of which she was unaware; and indeed she knew not that any one was near save her female attendant.

Leaning against the battlement, and but a few paces distant, stood Konrad

of Saltzberg, clad in the same long shirt of mail, and wearing the same salade that have already been described. For more than an hour he had been regarding Anna as a lover alone could have regarded her; but she was thinking only of her absent Earl, and watching the passing ships.

Many had been visible that day; for the vessels of Elizabeth, the English queen, were then sailing to the shores of Iceland, where her people had been permitted by the Danish king to fish for cod. The sun was dipping into the Atlantic, and, when half his circle was hidden by the horizon, the crimsoned waves became as an ocean of blushing wine, but their breakers were glittering in green and gold where they burst on the rocky beach of the isle.

The sun set; his rays died away from land and sea; the pink that edged the changing clouds, and the flush that reddened the water, grew paler and yet more pale, and the stars began to twinkle in the yet sunny blue of the sky. The last white sail, diminished to the size of a nautilus, had faded away in the distance, and Anna covered her face with her hands, and wept; from beneath the lappets of her little velvet cap, her bright hair fell forward in masses, and Konrad, though he saw not her tears, felt all his sympathy and his old love glow within him.

Resolving at all risks to discover himself, he removed his salade and advanced towards her. Anna raised her head at the clink of the shirt of mail, and, starting up, gazed upon him with astonishment while clinging to the parapet, for her strength almost left her. She would have become paler were it possible; but she was already so colourless, that death could not have made her more so.

Konrad expected a greater ebullition of fear, or joy, or astonishment, at his presence and safety; but Anna, who imagined he had merely expatriated himself from Aggerhuis, according to his threat at their last interview, expressed only the latter emotion in her features; and Konrad could not help feeling a little piqued, at her supposed indifference to the dangers he had run, and the watery grave he had so miraculously escaped.

"Konrad," she faltered—"thou here!"

"Anna, dear Anna!" exclaimed the unhappy young man, deeply moved by the sound of her voice, which, like an old and beloved air, stirred the inmost chords of his heart. "I did not expect to hear your lips again utter my name so tenderly."

He covered his eyes with his hand, and then the girl in turn was moved; she laid her hand gently on his arm, but he trembled so much that she withdrew it.

"Poor Konrad! you seem indeed changed; your eyes are hollow, and your cheek—it is very pale!"

"I have endured great grief; God alone knoweth how much agony has been concentrated in a heart that felt too narrow to contain it."

"I do pity thee, Konrad!"

"It is too late now. Thou didst love me once, Anna, and I feel bitterly how cold a substitute is pity. Oh! thou alone wert the link that bound me to the world; the link is snapped, and I am very desolate now!"

Anna sighed. She would have said *forgive me*; but her pride forbade it.

"The memory of hopes that are blighted, and wishes that were futile, presses heavily on me now," continued Konrad, whose brave spirit seemed to be completely broken; "and, at times, I feel nothing but despair."

"Ah, Konrad!" she replied, with a sickly attempt to smile, "in a few years we learn to laugh at the love of our youth, just as we do at an old-fashioned dress."

"With some it may be so, and 'tis a sad reflection; but, oh Anna! (pardon me repeating that well-loved name as of old,) in all my dreams of the future, I had so entwined our lives, and thoughts, and feelings, into one—I had so long viewed thee as my—my wife—that"—

"I must listen no more to this," said Anna, turning away with a reddening cheek.

"Thou art angry with me; but there was a time—and hast thou forgotten it quite?—when that word *wife* fell otherwise on thine ear. I trifle, lady. I have tidings to tell thee."

"I will not—I cannot—listen."

"For Heaven sake and your own, hear me!"

"This is alike sinful and insulting—this from the captain of my uncle's archers! Leave me, Konrad of Saltzberg!"

"By my past grief, by my blighted hope and present sorrow, I conjure thee, Anna, to hear me! I would speak to you of this man"—

"My husband?"

"The Lord of Bothwell," said Konrad, with a smile of scorn.

"Hah—well!" continued Anna in a breathless voice, while all her pride and petulance became immediately merged in intense eagerness.

"Thou hast not heard from him since his departure for the court of Scotland?"

"No—not one message hath come to Noltland, at least so sayeth the castellan."

"The castellan hath lied!" replied Konrad, with sparkling eyes; "he hath heard daily, and knows that this false Earl, whom he is now going to join and assist, hath been espoused, with every magnificence, to the sister of the Lord Huntly."

"And I—I"—gasped Anna.

"Thou art a captive for life in this island castle."

Anna clasped her hands passionately above her head, and would have fallen

backward had not Konrad sprung to her assistance; but, unable to trust himself with the part of upholding her almost inanimate form, he seated her gently, and hung over her with the utmost tenderness.

"Konrad," she said, with pale and quivering lips, but firm and tearless earnestness; "thou, thou didst never deceive me in word, in deed, or thought—say, how didst thou learn this?"

"How, matters not—'tis the sad verity."

"Thou triflest!" she said, with sudden passion and stamping her foot, while her eyes filled with tears, and she endeavoured to control the unutterable anguish that was expressed in every feature. "From whom, I demand, heardst thou these evil tidings?"

"From Hans Knuber, Lady Anna," replied Konrad, lowering his voice. "He trades, as thou knowest, with certain udallers of Shetland and Orkney, and this night his little crayer, the Skottefruin, (for so has he named her to please the Scots,) is about to sail for the river Clyde. The night is closing—if thou wouldst escape, an hour will set thee free."

"I do not—O no! I cannot—believe this tale; yet I will go with Hans—and whither? Is not anywhere better than this island prison? Yes—land me once in Scotland, and I will soon make my way to Bothwell."

"Thou art perhaps without money, and knowest not the Scottish tongue."

"Love and despair will sustain me without the first, and I shall soon acquire the second. How I will upbraid, how I will implore him; but he cannot have deceived me—Hans must be mistaken."

"But if he is not," said Konrad, piqued at the excess of her regard for another.

"Then I will throw myself at the feet of his sovereign; she is a woman, and, feeling as a woman, will do me justice."

"Wherever thou goest, Anna, permit me to be thy protector; and I will go, for am I not wedded to thee in spirit—thy brother, thy friend, if I cannot be thy lover? Unhappy one! thou dost now experience for another, the pangs that I endured for thee; thou who didst betray me, art now in thy turn betrayed. But think not, gentle one, that I upbraid thee," he continued, on seeing that she wept bitterly, "for now I am thy brother, Anna, since God denies me to be more; and by his blessed name I swear that I will lead, protect, and avenge thee! Come—be once again the daughter of stout old Svend of Aggerhuis, the conqueror of Lubeck—be once again a Norwegian!"

Like a ray of sunlight across a cold sky, a faint and sickly smile spread over Anna's face, and she kissed the hand of Konrad, who was deeply moved by the humility of the action.

"In an hour the night will be dark; have all prepared for flight, and then I will meet thee here. Meanwhile I go to Hans."

"Ah! if Hans should be mistaken, and Bothwell returning find me gone."

"Honest Hans is not mistaken; for Bothwell's marriage is known throughout all Scotland and the isles. Bethink thee, Anna! Hans' ship is bound for the Clyde, a river of that country, and he tells me that Bothwell's princely dwelling overlooks that very water; thus, with him, thou goest direct to the castle gates of thy deceiver."

"Enough! enough! Come triumph or death, despair or joy, I will go with thee. Away to Hans; bid him hasten our departure; he knows how well I can reward him when we are at home in dear Norway. In an hour from this time, Konrad, I will meet thee here."

As she hurried away, accompanied by her attendant, who had withdrawn during this painful interview, Konrad gazed wistfully after her, and, clasping his hands, convulsively muttered—

"O Anna! by what fatality did I ever love thee?".....

That night the moon shone brightly upon the strait of Westera, and the snow-white sails of the Norwegian ship were bellying in the breeze that curled the impetuous waves. Above, was the blue and star-studded sky; below, was the shining sea. Afar off, the full-orbed moon was rising like a silver shield from the ocean, and between lay a black speck—it was the Keep of Noltland.

On their lee lay the isle of Eglise-oy, with its green holms and yellow sands shining in the merry light of the summer moon, that turned to silver and emerald the waves that murmured on its pebbled shore.

A bell was heard to toll in the distance; its tone was deep and solemn, as it swung in the vaulted spire of old St. Magnus' church, that crowned a rocky headland. It was the signal of nocturnal prayer; for in those remote isles God was still worshipped as of old—the new creed of the Reformers, the clang of their hammers and levers, had been as yet unheard.

The outline of the old gothic church, with its solid tower and pointed spire, stood darkly out in bold relief upon the sea-beat promontory; the stars gleamed through the painted windows of its vaulted aisles; beneath, the waves were rolling in light, and the deep tones of the nocturnal bell were mingled with their hollow murmur.

Hans doffed his Elsinore cap, and prayed for the intercession of the friend and patron of the Orcadian mariner, Saint Tradewell of Papay; while Anna, in attendance to the distant call to prayer, knelt down on the deck with her crucifix and rosary.

Konrad was beside her.

She prayed intently for herself and for Bothwell, but Konrad offered up his

orisons for her alone.

CHAPTER XVI. BLANTYRE PRIORY.

I fain would sing, but will be silent now,
For pain is sitting on my Lover's brow;
And he would hear me, and though silent, deem
I pleased myself, but little thought of him,
While of nought else I think; to him I give
My spirit, and for him alone I live.

Pop. Poetry of Servia.

An evening of June was closing upon the "apple-bowers" of Clydesdale and the woods of Bothwellhaugh, when two pedestrians, a male and a female, pursued the ancient Roman way, that by a high and narrow bridge of one arch, which had been constructed by the warriors of Agricola, spanned the stream named the South Calder, a tributary of the Clyde. Fair in complexion and athletic in figure, the young man was attired somewhat like a lowland yeoman. He wore a plain black breastplate and headpiece, for at that time in Scotland, no man ever ventured beyond his own door without armour; he carried a sealskin wallet and pouch, and was armed with a sword, dagger, and quarterstaff. His breeches and hose were of coarse red sarcenet, his gloves and boots of yellow buff.

He partly led and partly supported the companion of his journey, a young lady, whose unusually pale complexion had been rendered yet more pallid by fatigue; but her velvet hood being well drawn forward, almost concealed her features. Though light and graceful, her figure was veiled in one of those ample plaids of purple and blue check which were then (and for two hundred years after) so common in the Lowlands of Scotland. She wore it over her head, and pinned under the chin, from whence it fell over her shoulders and enveloped her whole form. Her white gloves were fringed with black lace, and her wrists and arms, where visible, were remarkably white and delicate.

Konrad and Anna—for doubtless the reader has recognised them—were wearied and covered with dust, having travelled on foot from the old Stockwell bridge of Glasgow. The commercial capital of the West was then but a small trad-

ing town, clustered round the great church, which, four hundred years before, the pious David had founded on the bank of the Molendinar burn.

There the crayer of Hans Knuber had anchored, and was discharging her cargo of tar and stockfish, for which Hans received in exchange cottons, and silks, and tanned leather, which he sold to the best advantage in the cities on the Baltic; and there Anna heard the sequel of Konrad's tidings, and the confirmation of Bothwell's falsehood beyond a doubt.

They found themselves in Clydesdale almost penniless; but, rough and turbulent though the times were, neither in baron's hall nor peasant's cottage were food, fire, and shelter, refused to the wayfarer or the unfortunate; and in the assumed character of French travellers on their way to court, to seek the patronage of Le Crocque, the ambassador of Charles IX., or the Marquis d'Elboeuff, they had reached the district of Bothwell with comparative ease and safety. Though the mass of the people, under terror of the act of 1555, "Anent speaking evill of the Maist Christian Kingis subjectis," and that of the following year, which defined the naturalization of the French in Scotland, treated all strangers with respect, Anna and Konrad were frequently reviled at wayside hostels as "massmongers and idolaters, worshippers of Baal, and followers of the shavelings of hell!" for Anna had the temerity and enthusiasm to wear openly on her bosom, that emblem against which, by word and deed, the preachers of the Reformation had poured forth their wrath and fury—a crucifix.

Evening was closing, and the woods of Bothwellhaugh were throwing their darkening shadows on the winding Calder. The foliage was in all the vivid green of July, and the perfume of the summer blossoms from the groves of apple-trees loaded the balmy air. The day had been one of intense heat; there was not a breath of wind upon the uplands, every leaf was still, and nothing was stirring save the busy gnats, that revolved in swarms where the sunlight pierced the leafy vistas.

So still was the atmosphere, that nothing was heard save the gurgle of the glittering stream, or the hum of the mountain bees as they floated over the grass, and sought the wild violets and pansies that grew in the dewy shades.

The sunlight died away along the deep glen sides, that were fringed with leafy woodlands; on trees bending with foliage and fruit, on the white-walled and moss-roofed cottages, with their light smoke curling through the coppice, on the river that glided past, placidly in one part, hoarse and brawling between its scaured banks in another, on rocks tufted with purple heather, or yellow with ripening corn, fell the dying sunlight, blending all with hazy softness, till the last rays faded from the tree-tops and the castle turrets, that overlooked them; and then, as the blue sky became veiled by dun clouds, which the set sun edged with the most brilliant golden light, the air became dense and oppressive, and a dusky

crimson tinged the whole woodland scenery with the hue of blood. Perched on its rifted rock, the old square tower of Clelland turned to brick red; the Calder flowed below like a stream of purple wine, and the beechwood copse became like a grove of the red-leaved ilex.

The atmosphere soon became darker; a few heavy drops of rain plashed on the dusty causeway of the Roman road, and spread wide circles on the wooded stream that flowed beneath the bridge; the tops of the lofty trees were tossed, as the wind arose, and the summer thunder rumbled among the green and russet hills that overlook the fruitful valley of the Clyde.

"A storm is gathering, Anna!" said Konrad, gazing tenderly on her pale features; "and thou art growing faint and weary. Overtasked as it has been, thy little strength is completely exhausted; let me beseech thee once again to pause. There is a tower yonder that overhangs the river; and there, I doubt not, due hospitality will be gladly extended to two poor and unfriended foreigners!"

"No—no! On—on!" muttered Anna.

"We are, I believe, yet far from our destination; and, ere it is reached, thou wilt assuredly die of fatigue!"

"Then, O God! grant that it may be at Bothwell's castle gate!" said Anna, bursting into a passion of tears; "that the sight of my silent corpse might upbraid him with his perfidy. Assure me that he will behold me lying dead upon his threshold, and I will yield up my soul without a sigh. Life hath no longer any charm for me!"

"Nor for me!" murmured Konrad; but how different was the tone! The girl spoke in all the bitterness of rage; the young man with the accents of desolation. Anna read the emotion in his eyes, as she glanced hurriedly and pityingly upon him; and, repressing her own grief, still continued to totter forward. The feebleness of her steps became more and more apparent; but her spirit was strong and indomitable.

As they descended into the bosky woodlands, the red lightning began to gleam behind the trunks of the distant trees, and the Calder, as it jarred between ledges of rock, became covered with white foam. These signs of a coming tempest caused them to hasten on, and with both hands the trembling Anna clung to Konrad's arm. The woods grew dark as the plumes of a hearse, and the starless sky was crowded with masses of inky vapour;—but there was one dense cloud that came up from the westward, and in it the whole fury of the storm seemed to be concentrated. Onward it came, laying the corn flat to the earth, while the strong trees bent like willows beneath its sulphureous breath; for it was charged with all the electric fluid of the summer storm.

Konrad paused, and looked upward.

For a moment the aspect of the heavens was magnificent!

Forth from the bosom of that dark cloud broke one broad flash of forky lightning, resplendent, green, and lurid. For an instant it lit the whole firmament, and the earth beneath it, revealing the tossing forests and deep broad waters of Clyde, which was covered with snow-white foam, and poured on between its steep and wooded banks, making one bold sweep round Bothwell's dark red towers, that rose above them in massive magnificence.

In strong outline, tower and turret stood forth against the flaming sky, the lightning seeming to play among their summits, and all the leaves of Bothwell's blooming bank gleamed like filigree-work—but for an instant, and then all became darkness.

Another flash, brighter than the first, revealed the opposite bank of the stream, and the ruins of Blantyre Priory. Brightly, for a moment, pinnacle and pointed window, buttress and battlement, gleamed in the phosphorescent light—but to fade away; and then terrifically the thunder rolled along the beautiful and winding valley of the Clyde.

All became still—and though the foliage was agitated, the wind had passed away. Nothing was heard save the rush of the river, and the ceaseless hiss of the drenching rain, as noisily and heavily it poured down on the broad summer leaves.

Stunned for a moment by the thunder-peal, Konrad, in the confusion of the time, had thrown an arm round Anna as if to protect her, while she in turn clung to him convulsively for support; and even in that moment of consternation, the warm embrace of that loved bosom sent through his a thrill of pain and delight.

The thick foliage still protected them from the rain; but the necessity of seeking other shelter became immediately apparent, for Anna, exhausted by terror and fatigue, was almost speechless. Konrad supported her up the ascent, which is crowned by the ruins of Blantyre Priory; and there, in that desolate place, which the lightning had revealed to them, he found a place of shelter, under the arch of a vault, where the ivy clung and the wallflower flourished, for the place was utterly ruined. Seven years had elapsed since the sons of rapine and reformation had been there.

The gloom of the ruins impressed Konrad with a horror that he could scarcely repress; for thick and fast on his glowing fancy, came many a dark and terrible legend of the wild and frozen north—but the danger of Anna compelled him to think of other things.

The rain and the wind were over; the thunder had died away on the distant hills, and nothing was heard now but the rush of the adjacent stream, and the patter of the heavy drops as they fell from the overcharged foliage on the flattened grass. Occasional stars gleamed through the pointed windows and shattered walls of the Priory, and the long creeping ivy waved mournfully to and fro.

The edifice was much dilapidated; for the sacrilegious builders of many a barn and cottage, had torn the best stones from the places where they had rested for ages, and where, doubtless, the pious Alexander II. deemed they would remain for ever; now the wild-rose, the sweetbrier, and the mountain ash grew thickly in the hospitium, where of old the sick were tended and the poor were fed—in the chapel aisles where the good had prayed, and the dead of ages lay.

Anna had become almost insensible; and, from being animated by activity and energy, had become passive in spirit and supine in body. The change had affrighted Konrad; her pulses beat like lightning, and her hands and brow were burning. Gently, as if she had been a sick child, he laid her in a corner of that vaulted apartment, which appeared to have been a cellar of the Priory. There the strewn and crisped leaves of the last autumn lay thick and soft, and thinking only of death, in her utter exhaustion of mind and body, she made no reply to his tender and reiterated inquiries.

Konrad adjusted her damp dress over her beautiful person, and, full of solicitude and anxiety, seated himself near her. He listened—her breath was becoming fainter and more rapid; excessive fatigue and over-excitement had evidently done their worst upon her tender frame.

"Oh, how thy hands burn!" said Konrad, as he took them in his with the fondness of other days. "Speak, Anna—for the love of mercy speak to me!"

"I am very pettish and ungracious," she said faintly; "but forgive me, Konrad. I deserve not thy care—leave me to die; for God, I think, has deserted me!"

"Ah, speak not thus, Anna! God will never desert one so good—so gentle as thee. Hath he not led us to this chamber, where we are safe from the wind, and the rain, and the chill night-dew? but here thou canst not pass a night. The storm hath died away—one effort more"—

"I cannot rise, Konrad," said Anna, in a breathless voice.

"Then I must fly for succour!"

"No—no—O, do not leave me! I will die of terror; there may be demons, and wolves, and bears in these Scottish woods, as in those at home."

"But thou hast thy piece of the blessed cross, Anna. I go but to wind my bugle for succour at the foot of the hill, and surely some one in yonder castle by the river, will hear and attend to me."

"Then hasten, for my heart is sickening, and my strength is failing fast with the fever that burns within me."

Konrad sprang to his feet in an agony of anxiety.

"Oh Bothwell, Bothwell!" said Anna; "my dear lord—may heaven forgive thee, freely as I do, all the misery and suffering thou hast caused to this poor heart!"

These words fell like ice on the young man's heart, and he said hurriedly—

"Be of good cheer, and pray to thy patron, the mother of the virgin—I will bring thee succour anon."

"Konrad," said Anna, in her low, soft voice, "my words have stung thee, for thine accent is changed. Pardon me!" she added tremulously, "and remember that I, too, am desolate now. Dost thou cease to love me? Am not I thy sister, Konrad?"

"Thou art, indeed!" replied her lover, whose heart was crushed by his emotion; "and I regard thee with a love more pure and pitying than ever. I am thy friend, Anna—a lover no longer."

"Then, Konrad, kiss and forgive me—for I may die ere thou returnest."

Konrad trembled. A gush that cannot be described—sorrow, love, agony, and despair, swelled up in his breast on hearing this singular and artless request, and, stooping down, he pressed his lips to hers long and passionately.

It was the first time he had ever kissed her, and it was a strange salute.

Anna's lips were burning and parched—Konrad's were cold and quivering, while a palsy seemed to possess his heart; but he sprang from her side, vaulted over the ruined wall, and, giddy with the whirl of his thoughts, rushed down the hill to the margin of the river, and wound his bugle furiously.

Deep, broad, and rapid, between its steep and beautifully wooded banks, the noble Clyde was flowing at his feet, and the bright stars were twinkling in its depth. Afar off, at one end of the silvan dell, the moon was rising red and fiery after the recent storm, and full on the imposing façade of the neighbouring castle fell its fitful gleam.

Flanked by two enormous circular towers of massive dark red stone, it presented a bold front to the south, and overlooked the wooded declivity so famed in song, as—

"Bothwell'e bank that bloom'd so fair."

around which, like a great moat, the girdling Clyde made one bold sweep.

The area of this vast and princely fortress, where, in other years, the Norman knights of Aymer of Valence, and the bonneted vassals of Archibald the Grim, kept watch and wassail, occupies a space of two hundred and thirty feet; towering with its magnificent battlements above the river on one side, and overlooking a beautiful lawn on the other. It occupies the most prominent and picturesque locality amid all the scenery traversed by the Clyde.

Darkly in the fitful light loomed the tourelles of the keep, and the ramparts of the Valence and Wallace towers, and darkly fell their giant shadows on the bosom of the starlit river. Amid its gloomy mass Konrad saw lights twinkling from windows strongly grated and deeply recessed in the thick walk; but the

gates were closed, and the bridges up. *Now*—how different from then—

”The tufted grass lines Bothwell’s ancient hall,
The fox peeps cautious from the ruin’d wall;
Where once proud Moray, Clydesdale’s ancient lord,
A mimic sovereign, held the festive board.”

Ignorant that the stately castle before him was the stronghold of his rival, again and again Konrad poured the shrill blasts of his ivory bugle to the gusty wind; and, finding that he was unheard or unheeded by the inmates, his anxiety to procure aid for Anna would admit of no longer delay, and heavily encumbered as he was with half armour, he threw himself into the river, and, with his sword in his teeth, endeavoured to swim over. Though a strong, active, and practised swimmer, he no sooner found himself buffeting the fierce current of that rapid river, than an invocation to God burst from his lips; for he was swept away like a reed by the violence and impetuosity of the summer *speat*.

CHAPTER XVII. THE COUNTESS OF BOTHWELL.

Load roars the north round Bothwell hall,
And fast descends the pattering rain;
But streams of tears yet faster fall,
From thy blue eyes, O bonny Jane!
Hark! hark! I hear the mournful yell,
The wraiths of angry Clyde complain;
But sorrow bursts with louder swell.
From thy toft heart, O bonny Jane!
M. G. Lewis.

Within the stateliest chamber of that stately castle sat James, Earl of Bothwell, and his countess Jane, the bride of a few months. The apartment was long and lofty; in the daytime it was lighted by six grated windows that overlooked Bothwell bank, but now it was lit by two gigantic gilded chandeliers of wax candles. The ceiling was of panelled oak, and the floor was of the same material, but

lozenged, and minutely jointed. The walls were completely hung with tapestry (made by the Countess of old Earl Adam, who fell at Flodden), and represented on one side the "*Hunts of Cheviot*," so famed in ancient song; and on the other, the miracles of the blessed St. Bothan, the cousin and successor of St. Colme of Iona. The spaces between were filled up by gorgeous flower-pieces, and the armorial coats of the Earl's alliances on trees covered with shields; but chief of all appeared the blazon of the house of Hailes. Now little known, the arms of Bothwell are worth recording, as they appeared above the stone chimney of that apartment. *Gules* on a cheveron *argent*, two Scottish lions rending an English rose, (which had been the characteristic cognisance of Patrick Hepburn of Hailes at the great battle of Otterburn,) quartered *azure* with a golden ship; three cheveronels on a field *ermine* for the lordship of Soulis, with a bend *azure* for Vauss, lord of Dirltoun. His shield was supported by two lions *gardant*, crested by a horse's head bridled, and bearing on an escroll the motto—

Keepe Tryste.

The whole of this gorgeous armorial blazon was upborne by a gilded anchor, significant of Bothwell's office as Lord High Admiral of Scotland and the Isles.

Though the season was summer, a fire burned on the marble hearth; for the stone chambers of those ancient dwellings were often cold and chilly. Two silver lamps, lighted with perfumed oil, and having each a golden tassel appended to them, hung on each side of the mantelpiece, by the same chains that, ten years before, had swung them before St. Bothan's shrine, in Blantyre Priory. Their odour was mingled with that of the fresh flowers that, in vases of Italian glass, were piled upon the cabinets, and diffused a delightful fragrance through that noble apartment.

A wine vase, or flask of Venetian crystal, grained with gold, and of that peculiar fashion then very common in the dwellings of the Scottish noblesse, (so common, indeed, that the Regent Moray was wont to have them broken before visitors in a spirit of pure vanity,) stood upon the table, and the glow of its purple contents was thrown on the silver cups, the grapes, that were piled in baskets of mother-of-pearl, and the embossed salvers of confections that stood around it.

The Earl, richly attired, as when we last saw him, in a suit that admirably displayed the strength and symmetry of his limbs, was lounging on an ottoman, or low-cushioned settle, with his feet on a deer's skin, and seemed wholly occupied in caressing a large wiry hound of the Scottish breed, while the Countess had played to him on her ghittern, and sung that song so common at the court of Mary, but of which the title alone is known to us now—

”My love is layed upone ane knycht.”

The old game of Troy had succeeded; and then they paused a while to listen to the fury of the storm that has been described hi the preceding chapter; and, during the pause, we will take a view of this fair and unfortunate lady, who was sacrificed by her lover and brother to the evil spirit of statecraft and ambition. But when Bothwell gazed on her, which he did from time to time, his dark eyes filled with softness, as hers did with love and languor.

The outline of her little figure (for she was of low stature) was singularly graceful, as she half reclined on the seat of crimson velvet, with the deep colour of which her neck and arms contrasted so admirably. Her eyes were of the deepest and most sparkling black; and when they dilated at times, seemed almost larger than her cherry mouth.

She was a gentle and excitable creature.

The fineness of her nervous temperament, might have been read in the thinness and exquisite fairness of her skin, in the slender blue veins of her snowy temples, and the lustre of her large dark orbs, which, with every emotion of joy, tenderness, or grief, seemed to swim in tears. Her very laughter had something strangely clear, ringing, and hysterical in it. Her small white hand, at which the Earl almost unconsciously gazed more than at the diagram of the game, from its thinness and delicacy, was alike indicative of her nature and disposition.

Jane of Huntly was every way the *belle*-ideal of that description of high-born beauty, upon whose soft cheek not even the wind of heaven had been permitted to blow ”too roughly.”

She was richly attired in black velvet, flowered with silver thread; her raven hair was braided with a string of pearls, and wreathed in a coronal round her head; while a necklace of Scottish topazes and Arran stones, set in gold, sparkled on her bosom and sustained a silver crucifix, the dying gift of the stout Earl her father, who, four years before, had fallen in his armour on the battle-field of Corrichie.

When Bothwell gazed upon his countess, there was more of admiration, perhaps, than love in his expression. He loved her well enough after the fashion of the world, but not so devotedly and well as that gentle being deserved. Anna had almost been forgotten; his flexible heart had been so frittered away among his innumerable loves, that he seemed to have become incapable of any lasting impression. However, he loved his bride better than he expected; for, as we have before stated, this marriage had, on his part, been strictly one of policy.

At times when Jane’s dark eyes met his with their clear full gaze, there was a keen and searching expression in their starlike depth, that made the reckless noble quail, he knew not why; but her whole soul seemed to light them up with

a vivid expression that troubled him.

"Another flash—and another!" she exclaimed, watching the lightning and clasping her hands, while her swimming eyes glittered with childlike joy. "Oh, mother of God!—how beautiful—how brilliant! Ah, that I were among the woods where the lightning is flashing, or at the linn where the Clyde is pouring in foam from the rocks!"

"By the Holy Rood!" replied the Earl, with surprise, "I think thou art better here, my bonnibel. None but a water-kelpie could live abroad to-night, and one half hour of such a storm would send thee to the company of the saints."

"And again thou wouldst be free to woo and win another," rejoined the Countess, laughing.

"I never wooed, and shall not win another, my bonny Jane!" said the lying Earl; while lounging on the velvet cushions he caressed his little countess, and played with her dark glossy hair, thinking as he did so, "Ah, how could I ever love any woman but a dark one!"

"And wilt thou always love me as thou dost now?" asked the Countess with the most engaging playfulness.

"Love thee!" stammered the Earl, perplexed by a question so pertinent to his thoughts. "My ladybird, why that thought?"

"Because," replied Jane, in a voice that was tremulous from the excess of her emotion; "if thou didst cease to love, O my dear lord! I would"—

"What?"

"Die!" and her beautiful head drooped on his shoulder.

"Anna's very words!" thought the conscience-stricken Earl, as he gazed upon her with anxiety and astonishment. Her expression startled him; but he knew not that it was the wild animation and over-excitement that in a little time would be developed in a terrible malady, which was already preying upon the fragile form and ardent mind of the Countess—madness!

"Why dost thou doubt my love, Jane?" said the Earl; "it is four years since the Bishop of Dunblane betrothed thee unto me, and in that time my heart hath never wandered from thee."

"Ah! I don't doubt it—mother of God forefend that I should!" exclaimed the little Countess, while her eyes filled with tears, and she clung closer to her husband, "for thou wert the first love and the idol of me."

Bothwell's heart was touched; a pang shot through it when contemplating the deceit he had practised towards this loving and trusting creature, in winning her young heart and still retaining his own, and he kissed her tenderly.

"And thou, too, art mine idol, Jane; for since I first met thee, the fairest faces in the halls of Holyrood and Linlithgow have been without one attraction for me."

"And yet, dost thou know, there was one of whom, until her marriage, I was wont to be jealous; for thou wert ever engaged with her in conversations full of wit and laughter and repartee."

"Hah!" said Bothwell, colouring perceptibly.—"Thou meanest Mary Beaton, I warrant."

"Nay! Nay!" laughed the Countess; "naughty varlet! thou knowest well whom I mean."

"Mary Fleming, then, whose father fell at Pinkie-cleugh."

"Nay, God forbid! she is the wife of thy friend, the secretary; another, and a fairer Mary, still."

"By St. Abb on the Nab! little fairy, thou meanest the Queen herself!" exclaimed Bothwell with a loud laugh, as if he had no previous idea of who was meant. "This would be to make me a rival of Henry Darnley—a proper squire, and a tall fellow, too—Ha! ha! thou art a merry wag, my bonnibel," added the Earl, as he turned to the grape basket, for the purpose of hiding the deep colour that crimsoned his face from beard to temple. "Thou mistakest, dear Jane; my thoughts never soared so high, and it may prove dangerous to—hark! is not that the blast of a hunting-horn?"

"And by the river-side?"

"Some belated wayfarer."

"I see no one," said the Countess, who had run to a window.

"It may be Lauchope and his jackmen—there was some whisper abroad of their riding tonight, anent his feud with the Laird of Clelland concerning their meithes and marches. Seest thou aught like lances or steel caps glittering in the moonlight, for now the storm has died away?"

"There is a man by the river-side. Hark! he winds his bugle again and again; the poor soul seemeth in some sad jeopardy."

"Ho! Calder—Bertram—French Paris—ho there, without!" cried the Earl; and two pages, the younger sons of the neighbouring lairds of Southcalder and Bertram-shotts appeared, rubbing their eyes, for they had both fallen asleep in the antechamber over tric-trac and Rochelle. "Quick! ye little guzzling varlets—summon the Gate-ward and his yeoman—away to the river, and see what aileth yonder fellow that he winds his horn so dolorously!"

"Mother Mary!" cried the Countess, clinging to the Earl; "see—see! he is about to plunge into that rapid stream—he is in! God—now—now! see how he buffets with the current! Oh, how small, how feeble, he seems amid that hoarse and foaming river! Oh, save him! for the love of Heaven and of heavenly mercy: away, my lord, away!"

"'Tis more than likely this fellow is some rascally Egyptian. There hath been a band of such knaves on Bothwellmuir for this month past; but should it

be Johnnie Faa himself—hurry the Gate-ward—and his grooms”—

”Now—now he is gone—he is down! how fast the current sweeps him on! I can look no more!” and, burying her face in her hands, the excitable little Countess fell on her knees, exclaiming passionately, ”Fie on thy boasted valour, Lord of Bothwell! for thou hast stood idly by and seen this poor man drowned!”

”By cross and buckler! since thou art so free with thy husband’s life, Lady Jane,” said the Earl angrily, ”’tis alike at the service of thee and this knave-errant. Follow me, Calder and French Paris!” and, raising the arras that concealed a door which communicated with a staircase and postern leading to Bothwellbank, the Earl rushed away.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE RESCUE.

Then on they hurried, and on they hied,
Down Bothwell’s slope, so steep and green;
And soon they reach’d the river Clyde,
Alas! no Edgar still is seen.
M. G. Lewis.

Attended only by two of his pages, Bothwell left the postern door at the foot of the Valence Tower, and hurried down the *bank*, or wooded declivity, at the base of which the Clyde, swollen by the recent rains, was foaming past with a hoarse and ceaseless roar, rending the rough whin boulders and red earth from its scaured banks, and hurrying trees, and turf, and bushes—the debris of its hundred tributaries—to the waves of the western sea.

”Use thine eyes, Calder! Dost thou see him, Paris?” said the Earl, stooping low to pierce the gloomy shade thrown by the copse-wood upon the river.

”He struggles yonder, my lord!” cried Nicholas Hubert, or French Paris, as he was usually named.

”Nay, thou glaiket mole!” said little Calder; ”’tis a tree. Seest thou not that he buffets the water a furlong further down?”

”Right, my little fellow! thou hast the very eyes of a true huntsman!” said the Earl; ”’tis a man’s head; I see him; he floats like a cork on the strong current. Shout, boys, while I wind my bugle, to let him know that aid is nigh!”

The pages placed their hands to their mouths, and uttered a loud hunting holloa, while Bothwell repeatedly wound his silver bugle. Then a faint cry came from the hissing water, and the drowning man waved an arm with the action of despair.

"He points to the Priory," said Paris; "now, what may that import?"

"By Saint Paul! he is in harness!" exclaimed the Earl; "and the weight of it is sinking him fast. Shall we stand here, like base runnions, and see him perish? Never!"

"Good, my lord—be wary!" urged Calder.

"Sweet, my noble master—have a care!" said Paris; "he may only be some drunken trooper of Lauchope or Clelland's, whom his comrades have lost when fording the river!"

"But to die, and unaided, under my hall windows! No! no! that would be a blight upon my name for ever," cried the Earl as he unbuckled his belt, and throwing down his mantle, bugle, and poniard, leaped without a moment's hesitation into the watery tumult, exclaiming as he did so, "Saint Bothan of Bothwell for me!"

He plunged in a few yards above where the man was struggling with the current, that was foaming past him with the speed of a swollen mill-race.

Exhausted with his efforts, the unfortunate swimmer clung to an ash-tree that had sunk into the stream by having the soil partly washed away from its root, and the foam-bells were dancing white and frothy around it. The current bore the Earl close to him; he grasped him by the scarf, and then, both yielding a little to the impetuous current, swam together to a point of rock close by, where the Earl, strong, active, and fresh, dragged the rescued man ashore, and he was immediately supported by the pages, who were very vociferous in praise of their lord's courage and address.

"Praise God, and not me!" he replied; "for a moment more had seen the poor man perish. Behold the tree to which he clung!"

At the moment he spoke, the tough ash was rent from its tenacious rooting, and swept by the swollen stream like a withered reed round the wooded promontory, which is crowned by the castle of Bothwell.

"'Twas a brave feat and a perilous!" said Paris.

"A gallant deed and a godly!" chorused young Calder, though both were laughing in secret to see their lord shaking himself like a water-spaniel.

"Enough," said he, "from both, and thou in especial, Master Calder, for thou hast the very snuffle of a preacher in thy nostrils. Remove this man's steel bonnet—faith! he seems quite speechless; but lead him by the postern to the hall, while I don me another doublet and shirt, for I am wet as a water-dog."

A few minutes sufficed to change the Earl's attire, and to find him lounging

on the crimson settle in that luxurious chamber, toying with the countess's raven ringlets, and listening to her praises of his strength and courage, and her regrets and agonies, &c., for the danger on which her taunts had hurried him.

Her dark eyes were again sparkling with light and love; but the tenderness and engaging fondness of her manner failed as before to enliven or win the attention of her husband.

In his mind there was, he knew not why, a sad presentiment of impending evil; his heart was oppressed by that kind of dead calm that in some men precedes a tempest of passion. The childlike fondling of the beautiful countess was now lavished in vain. Ceasing to address him, she sighed and drooped her head; while her fairy fingers patted and played with the strong hand and arm, that more from habit than from love had almost unconsciously encircled her.

French Paris, the Earl's favourite and most trusted page, now raised the arras and presented his saucy and ruddy face.

"Well," asked the Earl, "how fares it with the person whom I fished out of the river?"

"He will be well, and with you anon, my Lord."

"What manner of man is he?"

"French, my lord, I think; but he has not yet spoken."

"Good! by his sleeves of fluted plate I deemed him a gentleman. He will be one of d'Elboeuff's retinue."

"Monsieur le Marquess has been hunting with the Hamiltons in the wood of Orbiestoun, so 'tis very likely."

"Well, bring the stranger hither with all speed."

"We have hung him heels uppermost to run the water out of him; and when we have reversed him, and replaced the said water by a bicker of wine, we will present him to your lordship."

"A forward March chick!" said the Earl, as the page disappeared. "By the mass! when I carried the helmet of old John of Albany, I dared not have spoken so flippantly even to a simple squire or archer as this saucy imp doth to me, who am a belted Earl."

"'Tis the influence of Calvinism," said the Countess; "but Heaven be praised that thou, my dear lord, and my gallant brother, with Arran, Errol, and Herries, shall again raise up those blessed altars which the frenzy and fanaticism of an hour hath destroyed!"

"That is just as may suit my ambition," thought the Earl; "but hush, my ladybird," he added aloud; "talk not thus in the hearing of our people, for knowest thou—How now!" he exclaimed, as the arras was shaken and raised; "Paris, is it thee?"

"Yes, my lord. The stranger is a gentleman of Norway, and he earnestly

craves a brief audience.”

The Earl started and arose; he grew pale, and his eyes sparkled with anger and confusion; but he had still sufficient tact to avert his face, that the countess might not perceive his emotion.

”Saidst thou a gentleman of Norway?” he stammered; ”now, what in the fiend’s name brought him to swim in the Clyde at midnight?”

”I know not, my lord.”

”The fool—in armour, too!”

”That was the only wise part of his proceedings; for no man ventures abroad in these days without his iron case.”

”Silence, sirrah! Norway,” muttered Bothwell, in great confusion; ”ass and jolt-head that I have been! Had I known he was of Norway, he had been tossing over the steepest falls of Clyde by this time for aught that I had cared. ’Tis some demon from the north I suppose—some devil of the wood, or the rocks, or the ice—some kinsman of Anna—(Nippen himself, perhaps.)—ha! ha! come to beard Bothwell in his own hall. God’s blood!” he muttered, setting his teeth on edge, while his eyes glared with a fury suitable to his terrible oath; ”he must be a stout fellow, and a rare one, who, knowing me, will bruit abroad my dangerous *secret*.”

He trod hastily to and fro, while, alarmed and filled with curiosity, the countess approached, and, taking his hands in hers, said—

”My sweet lord—my dear lord—now prithee tell me what is all this about?”

”What thou hadst better not hear, my bonnibel,” replied the Earl, turning abruptly from her; but on seeing that her dark eyes filled with tears, he added gently—”’Tis the stranger, Jane—a man-at-arms—one of Hob Ormiston’s vassals, who would speak with me on matters unbecoming a lady’s ear; so, I pray thee to retire!”

”Hast thou any secrets from me—from me, who loves thee so well—whose life is thy love?”

”I keep nothing secret that thou shouldst hear; but this”—

”Concerneth a woman, doth it not?” said the Countess, growing pale, while her dark eyes filled with a strange and dusky fire.

”A woman, sayest thou?” stammered the Earl, grasping her arm; ”who can have told thee that?”

”Thine own lips did so! Did I not hear thee speak of one called *Anna*?”

”Confusion! no!—go! go! thou art mistaken; I swear to thee, thou art; and anon I will explain how. Retire, lady, for this man would speak with me alone, on matters which concern the state. Paris! raise the arras, and lead him in; but, on peril of thy neck, see that thou keepest beyond earshot!”

The Countess retired, with an expression of face in which surprise and chagrin were blended with the hauteur that seemed to dilate her little figure, as

she swept out of the apartment, and the heavy tapestry fell behind her.

"Jealous, by St. Paul!" said the Earl; "but how can she have divined my secret, or learned the name of Anna? Poor Anna! I dream much of her! Now, Heaven forefend I should mutter of her in my sleep, and thus reveal my heart's most deadly secret! But there was jealousy in the eye of Jane, or I am immensely mistaken. There can be none without love, say the casuists. Well! but this maudlin love of hers becomes at times excessively tiresome; and yet I cannot help liking the little dame. Her eyes, St. Mary! how they shone! Ho, there, Calder! lead in this merman—this water-kelpie—and let us know what he would have of James Hepburn!"

CHAPTER XIX. THE REJECTED AND THE RIVAL.

When fix'd to one, Love safe at anchor rides,
And dares the fury of the winds and tides;
But losing once that hold, to the wide ocean borne,
It drives at will, to every wave a scorn.

Dryden.

Though the Earl spoke aloud with an air of careless bravado, he was not without sincere apprehension for the issue of this visit; and when contemplating what might ensue, if his rash and foolish espousal of the Norwegian lady became known to Lord Huntly, various dark ideas of threats, of dule-tree and dungeon, were suggested as the surest means of procuring silence. The malice and gibing of his highborn enemies at court—the queen's indignation—the countess' grief and anger—Huntly's pride and scorn!

"Devil!" muttered Bothwell, playing with his Parmese dagger; "it may be old Rosenkrantz himself! Would that Black Ormiston were here to advise me!"

His heart beat like lightning as footsteps crossed the antechamber; they came nearer; a hand grasped the arras, and the stranger (whom the pages had attired in one of Bothwell's own suits, but who still had his sword, dagger, and corselet) stooped as he entered, and stood erect before him, with head drawn back, his breast heaving, his eyes kindling, and his cheek flushing.

Save a fierce glance, no other greeting was exchanged between them.

"I see that the gay Lord of Bothwell has not forgotten me," said Konrad in French.

"The lover of Anna Rosenkrantz—Konrad of Saltzberg—here, within the walls of Bothwell!"

"Ay, proud noble, here!—beard to beard with thee; yet, believe me, had I known that the fortress, whose round towers rose so grimly above the river, were those of my greatest foe, I had rather have perished among its foaming waters than, given one cry for succour, save to God!"

"I disclaim all enmity, Sir Konrad—but, if this be thy spirit, why seek my presence? My gates are open, and thy course is free."

"I come but to thank thee for having saved a life which, though worthless now to me, I have for a time dedicated to the service of another."

"Thou didst save mine from the waves of the Skager Rack," said the Earl.

"Would to Heaven I had left thee to perish!" muttered Konrad, in a burst of anguish.

"Thou didst then establish a claim to my eternal gratitude, and I thank God that he hath this night enabled me to repay my debt. We are now equal."

"'Tis well! I would not be *thy* debtor for all the silver in the mines of Bergen; thou art alike faithless and base—yea, Lord of Bothwell, I tell thee in thine own hall, that thou art a dishonoured villain."

The Earl started as if a serpent had stung him, and made a movement as if to sound his bugle.

"I am here beneath thy roof," continued Konrad; "within thy lofty towers and gates of strength, and I fearlessly repeat, that thou art the villain this sword shall one day proclaim thee, in the midst of assembled thousands."

"Thou art stark mad, young fellow!" said the Earl, making an effort to restrain his passion, from a sense of the injury he had done the speaker, and the deceit practised towards Anna, of whose escape and immediate vicinity he had not the most remote idea. "Konrad, I am aware that I have wronged thee deeply, for I have acted most unwittingly to thee, the part another acted once to me; for in my hot and ardent youth, I loved one who neglected me with a coquetry and a cruelty that, to this hour, have cast a shadow over my fortune and my days, I have loved many since then; but, as God knoweth, none with the ardour and passion that welled up in my boyish bosom for that young girl, my first and earliest love. Since then, a morbid and mischievous spirit has led me—in vengeance, as it were—to make women my playthings and my toys, each after each to be won, thrown aside, and forgotten, when I tired of them—yea, thrown aside like flowers whose perfume is gone."

Touched by the Earl's gentleness, the eyes of Konrad filled with tears; and, clasping his hands, he said with great bitterness—

"Oh! Lord of Bothwell, in pursuit of this ideal vengeance thou hast destroyed me."

"Forgive me," said the Earl, laying a hand kindly upon his shoulder; "forgive one who has endured all that you now feel; but, mark me, a time will come when thou wilt despise the woman who could so coldly desert thee for another."

"Oh, never!" said the young man earnestly—"never!"

"Remember the old saw that sayeth, 'There are as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it.' Thou art still young, Konrad; thy years"—

"Have scarcely numbered two-and-twenty, and already I am tired of life."

"Thou art mistaken; the old man may weary of existence, but the young man never. The ardour of thy love will die"—

"Never, my lord—I tell thee, never!"

"Ha! ha!—how, dost thou love her still?"

"God alone knows how deeply and how dearly."

"Jesu! after she hath so misused thee? This is indeed the love of romance," said the Earl, who thought he now saw some hope of ridding himself of Anna, and so doing both himself and her lover a service. "Well, Konrad, if thy passion is the same, and if Anna might be restored to thee"—

"What! now—when in heart and soul she is the wife of another? Never! Much as I love her still, though on her bended knees she implored that love, I swear to thee, Sir Earl, by God and St. Mary, I would withhold it! I love her, 'tis true—but oh! not with the same passion as of old. Thou hast rifled my flower of its perfume, and broken the chain that love and innocence cast around it. Though Anna still, she is no longer the Anna who was the idol of my first day-dreams. No, my lord, to me her love would now be but a mockery and an insult."

"By the mass! but I love thy spirit, and if I could be thy friend"—

"Friend!" reiterated Konrad with a bitter smile; "no, my lord—that thou never canst be!"

"Then what devilish errand brings thee now to Scotland?"

Konrad hesitated in replying, for he was so much in the Earl's power that some subterfuge was necessary.

"Is it to seek vengeance on me, or to compel me to do some manner of justice to thy false lemane?" asked Bothwell, haughtily.

"Justice? hast thou not wedded another after thy deliberate espousal of her?"

"Dost thou deem the mock blessing of yon mad hermit a spousal rite?" exclaimed the Earl, laughing; "what passed well enow for a marriage on the half-barbarian shores of thy native fiord, will scarcely be deemed one in this reformed land of stern superintendents, ruling elders, and wrathful ministers—ha! ha!"

Konrad repressed his rising passion, and his hand involuntarily sought the

pommel of his dagger; but the recollection of Anna, lying helpless and faint among the ruins of the desolate Priory, made him adopt the less hostile course.

"I go to push my fortune under the banner of some of your border chiefs and turbulent nobles, for thou hast made me loathe the land of my birth, though there I have garnered up my heart; and sadly the memory of its dark blue hills and waving woods cometh ever to my mind; and if, Lord of Bothwell, in the strife that all men say will soon convulse this land, thou meetest Konrad of Saltzberg in his helmet—look well to thyself; for by the bones of Olaus! in that hour thou mayest need the best of thy mail and thy manhood to boot."

"Be it so!" replied the Earl with bold frankness. "If that time ever comes, Sir Konrad, the memory that I have wronged thee deeply will alone make me blench. But go thy way, and God be with thee! for Bothwell hall hath scarcely space enow to contain two such spirits as thou and I, even for one night. Ho, there!—French Paris, lead this gentleman to the gates. He is the first who hath rejected with scorn the proffered friendship of the house of Hepburn, and bent a dark brow on a lord of Bothwell under his own roof-tree!"

CHAPTER XX. KONRAD AND THE COUNTESS.

Oh, Bothwell bank! that blooms so bright
Beneath the sun of May;
The heaviest cloud that ever blew,
Is bound for you this day.
Aytoune's Lays.

Konrad was now doubly anxious to return to Anna, on learning the dangerous nature of the predicament in which she was placed, and the sad truth that, beyond a doubt, the faithless Earl had really cast her off for ever, by his marriage with the Lady Jane Gordon. Under these circumstances, the young man knew how much there was to dread should she rashly seek the presence of the Earl, who might be compelled to adopt some dark and desperate course to silence her for ever, in dread of her accusations and clamour, which might so seriously injure his public character and domestic peace.

While the interview recorded in the last chapter was taking place, the

Countess of Bothwell was sitting in her bower, with her dark eyes full of tears; for the manner of the stranger, and certain expressions uttered by the Earl, had roused her jealousy, and wounded her self-esteem. Old stories of Bothwell's innumerable intrigues and gallantries floated dimly and painfully through her mind, and her vivid imagination filled up a dark tableau of—she knew not what—but which her wilful and impetuous nature prompted her, at all risks, to fathom.

"Come hither, French Paris," she said to the youngest page, a pretty lad, who had been presented to the Earl by the young Queen Mary; "come hither," she continued, with one of her most engaging smiles. "Lead that strange man to my presence on the first opportunity; for I must see him before he leaves the castle!"

"Lady—the stranger?" stammered the lad.

"I said the stranger, sirrah! Didst thou not hear me?" she replied, pettishly.

"I dare not, lady; for it seemeth to my poor comprehension that there lurketh some mystery"—

"For that very reason, thou prevaricating little varlet, I wish to converse with him."

"I dare not, madam; for well thou knowest that our lord, the Earl, is not to be trifled with."

"'Tis mighty well, this, Master Paris! can I neither tempt nor oblige thee to obey me, and keep my secret?"

"Thou canst well do both, sweet madam," replied the gallant page, with a coy glance.

"Then here, thou little miser, are ten golden unicorns," said the Countess, taking her purse from her girdle; but the pert boy drew back, saying—

"How, Lady Bothwell! wouldst thou think to bribe the son of a French knight like the spawn of a rascally clown? If I am paid for keeping a secret, St Mary! 'twill be with no other coin than Cupid's."

The Countess reddened; but finding it necessary to humour the lad, who had her so completely in his power,—

"Thou forward imp!" she replied; "one may easily discern thy court education. I will give thee one kiss now, and another after I have seen this stranger. But see to it, sirrah, that thou art secret and sincere, or the kiss may be more fatal than that of Judas."

"Sweet lady!" replied the saucy boy, blushing with pleasure as the lip of the beautiful Countess touched his blooming cheek, "at the risk of my life will I serve thee; and in the hour I fail, may Heaven fail me!"

He sprang away, and, coiling himself up in his mantle, watched near the door of the Earl's chamber till he was summoned to lead forth the unwelcome visiter.

"Boy," said Konrad, "I will give thee a silver crown, if thou wilt lead to the first and nearest bridge that crosses yonder river."

"Fair sir, follow me!" said the page; and, cap in hand, by a narrow spiral stair, which ascended to the second story of the Valence tower, he led Konrad straight to the bower of the countess.

"Where art thou leading me, boy?" asked Konrad suspiciously; while keeping one hand on his dagger, and the other on the page's mantle, as they stumbled up the dark stair, through the slits of which the night wind blew on their faces, and they heard the endless rush of the adjacent Clyde.

"I lead thee where silence is best, else thou mayest come down with the aid of other legs than thine own."

"How, varlet! what jade trick is this?" exclaimed the young man with surprise, on being suddenly ushered into a magnificent little boudoir, where he found himself in presence of a lady.

"'Tis the Countess of Bothwell," whispered French Paris, "who would learn from thee"—

"What thou art not to hear," interrupted the Countess; "so, begone! and if thou wouldst keep that head on thy shoulders, retire behind the arras, and muffle it well in thy mantle."

French Paris immediately retired; and Konrad, whose anxiety for the safety of Anna (when he remembered the half-dying state in which he left her,) amounted now to agony, stood silent and confused, gazing with irresolution on the Countess. He bowed with the deepest respect; for her beauty and dignity, notwithstanding her diminutive stature, were very striking.

The position she occupied, and the splendour by which she was surrounded, contrasted forcibly, in his mind, with the forlorn condition of Anna Rosenkrantz, stretched on the couch of leaves among the ruins like a homeless outcast; and he felt, he scarcely knew why, a sentiment of hostility struggling with pity for the Countess.

Her large and oriental-like eyes dilated as she asked—

"Art thou the man whom my husband saved from the river?"

"I am, lady; but, had he known me, I had been left to perish amid its waters."

"Thou art quite a youth, and a handsome one, too—a Frenchman, I think?"

"Nay, noble lady, I am of old Norway in the distant north; but a good Catholic, as I see thou art by thy crucifix."

"Our religion is a bond of friendship in these dangerous days of obdurate heresy," said the Countess, whose eyes lighted up; "but wherefore sayest thou my lord would rather thou hadst perished, though he risked his life to save thee?"

"Because," replied the other with a lowering brow, "I am the bearer of a secret that if, unfolded to thee, would make the Lord Bothwell slay me, even if I

stood with the grace-cup on his own hearthstone.”

”And what is this secret?” she asked with a hauteur that was assumed to hide her trembling curiosity.

”Excuse my revealing it, lady, and let me begone, I pray you, for an agony of anxiety oppresses me. One day, perhaps, you may—you must know all!”

”Now—tell me now, I implore thee? Behold this ring; it contains four diamonds, each worth I know not how many angels”—

”I am a gentleman, and a captain of arblastiers under Frederick of Denmark, and to me your bribe is proffered in vain. I repeat, madam, that I must decline to reveal the secret.”

”This is alike insolent and cruel!” said the Countess, raising her voice, while her dark eyes flashed, and her little hands were clenched. ”Tell me this instant all thou knowest, or I will summon those who will make thee. I have a proud lord, and a jealous. Beware! Think what he may do if thou art found in my chamber at this hour. Now, the secret—the secret! Man, thy life is in my hands!” She seized a silver whistle that lay on the table—hand-bells were not then in use—and there was something so malevolent in the threat, and so serpent-like in the expression of her wild dark eyes, that Konrad was both startled and provoked. ”The secret”—

”Is—That *thou art not* Countess of Bothwell!” he replied, with quiet scorn.

”What hast thou dared to say?” she asked, in a breathless voice, and grew paler than marble.

”That thy husband is a villain, lady—a villain who hath deceived thee cruelly! He has another Countess, who shall one day claim him, and compel him to acknowledge her as such before the assembled peers of Scotland; for she is of noble birth in her own country, and the warlike King Frederick will not permit the honour of her house to be trifled with.”

”Man, thou hast lied—oh, say thou hast lied! Oh, say that thou art mistaken!” said the Countess, in a low and broken voice, as she sank upon a settle with a ghastliness of face, which the darkness of her eyes and hair increased.

”I am not mistaken, lady. I swear to thee by every saint who is blessed in heaven, and by their shrines that are revered on earth, that I am *not!* He is solemnly espoused to Anna”—

”*Anna!* ’tis the name he has muttered thrice in his sleep.”

”Anna Rosenkrantz, a lady of Norway, who at this hour wears on her marriage finger the emerald ring which the hermit of Bergen blessed, and with which she was solemnly espoused.”

”Sayest thou an emerald ring?” demanded the Countess, a sudden light flashing in her eyes, while her lips became more white and parched.

”Yea, lady, wherein the traitor had inscribed a legend, purporting that ’the

gift and the giver were hers for ever.”

The Countess uttered a wild cry, and threw her clasped hands above her head.

”Holy Mother look upon me, that my senses may be preserved! That ring was mine—my betrothal gift to him. He said ’twas lost during his exile; and with that gift (which my good and pious kinsman, the Bishop of Dunblane, blessed on our plighting day) he hath espoused another! But I will be avenged! and by the soul of my murdered father, who with his sword in his hand and the cross on his brow, fell on the field of Corrichie, I will raise through all Strathbolgie and Aboyne a cry for vengeance, that Scotland will long remember!”

”Against whom, lady?” asked Konrad, who had now a dash of the cynic in his manner. ”The man thou lovest?”

But there was no reply. Exhausted by the fury of that tempest of passion, which convulsed a frame at all times too excitable and nervous, the Countess had become insensible; and then Konrad, full of the tenderest concern, was approaching, when French Paris, who had been listening intently to the whole interview, and now began to tremble for his own bones, raised the arras, and, plucking him by the sword, said—

”If thou valuest thy life, follow me and begone! Her cries have reached the hall, and already I hear the voice of the Earl.”

They rushed down the secret stair to the postern, the arras barely closing over Konrad at one end of the bower chamber, when the astonished Earl raised it at the other.

CHAPTER XXI. DISAPPOINTMENT.

Once more the gate behind me falls;
Once more before my face
I see the moulder’d abbey walls
That stand within the chase.
Tennyson.

Konrad stood on Bothwell bank, the wooded declivity that sloped abruptly to the margin of the Clyde, in whose deep bosom the stars were now reflected; for

all traces of the storm had died away, and the wet foliage of the woodlands was rustling in the soft west wind that blew from the darkened hills of Lanark.

High and sombre in its feudal strength and architectural pride, towered up the keep of Bothwell, and its grass-tufted barbican wall. Lights flashed through the casements of turret and corridor, and loud voices were heard calling clamorously in the echoing court.

"There lies thy path," said the page, pointing towards the river; "traverse its banks for about a mile till thou reachest the bridge of Bothwell. The hamlet of the same name is near it, and there thou canst pass the night."

"Is there no place nearer? consider again, good lad," said Konrad, thinking more for Anna than himself, as he slipped the promised crown into the page's hand.

"The warder of the bridge resides in a house above the archway, which is closed after nightfall. He keeps an hostelry which affordeth good up-putting both for men and horses; but mark me, fair sir! seek neither hamlet nor hostel to-night, for we know not what evil may come of thy plaguy interview with the countess. Keep in the woods, and lie *en perdu* till daybreak, and then God speed thee!"

The postern closed, and Konrad stood alone.

A vague sense of danger impelled him to hurry from the vicinity of the castle; but he was less actuated by that motive than by his anxiety to rejoin Anna, from whom he had now been two hours absent, without procuring the succour she required so much.

He found the passage of the river open, for the warder had partaken somewhat freely of the potations of a traveller who had tarried there about curfew-time, and consequently he had forgotten to secure the barrier-gate that closed the roadway after dark, and which none could pass without paying toll, or drinking a can of ale at his hostel. Konrad passed on; and just as day was brightening in purple and orange on the distant hills, he began to ascend the eminence which was crowned by the ruined priory of the Augustines of Blantyre.

As day broke on the green woods of Bothwell, and the magnificent river, a hundred yards in breadth, that flowed in blue and silver light between them, no other silvan scene could surpass that landscape in beauty and romance. Contrasting strongly with the bright green of the summer forest, which was seen at intervals between the ivied buttresses and shattered windows of the gothic priory, rose Bothwell's broad round towers and ponderous ramparts, shining almost blood-red in the rising sun, being all built of ruddy-coloured stone. White and silvery, from the margin of the deep and crystal river, the morning mist curled up through the heavy foliage in a thousand fantastic shapes, and melted away in the thin air of the blue and balmy sky.

Hurrying among the grass-grown masses of the broken tombs and fallen walls, Konrad entered the vault where he had left Anna, and a pang shot through his bosom on beholding her lying at full length, still and motionless, on her bed of leaves. Her face seemed pale as death when viewed by the dim light that struggled through the arched chamber, from a little pointed window in the massive wall.

"If she should be dead!" he thought, as he stooped tenderly over her. "Ah! Heaven be thanked, she only sleeps!"

The contour and pallor of her beautiful fece, then attenuated by mental suffering and bodily fatigue, seemed almost sublime in the placidity of its aspect. Tears were oozing heavily from her long lashes, and her respirations were short and quick as her lover bent over her, and, taking one of her passive hands in his, pressed it gently to his lips.

Anna awoke, and started on beholding Konrad, whose attire had been changed; for the pages of the Earl had given him a sombre suit of black sarcenet in lieu of his wet garments.

"Konrad," she said faintly, "thou hast tarried long."

"Not one moment longer than I could avoid, dearest Anna! Thou canst not guess where I have been, and whom I have seen."

"Thou hast seen *him*," she replied, with a radiant face; "whom else couldst thou see that I care for?"

"I *have* seen him, lady," said Konrad, over whose countenance there fell a deeper shade of melancholy. "I have seen him, and stood with him face to face in his own castle hall."

"Oh!" exclaimed Anna; and, half-clinging to Konrad's neck, she turned upon him a face and eyes that were radiant with eagerness and joy; "and what said he? what message sent he to me—to his well-loved Anna? why came he not himself?"

"Thou hast forgotten, Anna" —

"Ah! my God! yes—the story. He is still faithful to me—say that he is, dear Konrad!"

"Six months ago, with all formality and magnificence, he was married to another, and thou art no more remembered than the last year's snow."

"This must—must be some dreadful dream or fantasy!" said Anna, pressing her hands upon her temples.

"I have seen his bride."

"Is she beautiful?"

"Yes, singularly beautiful, and gentle, and winning."

"Hah!" muttered Anna sharply through the teeth, which were set like a vice.

Her face was pale and colourless. An expression of jealous bitterness, of anger, and reproach, were on her forehead, and sparkling in her eyes, which were almost white with an aspect of passion, such as Konrad had never before witnessed in her usually calm features; and, taking her hands in his, he said tenderly—

”Be composed, dearest Anna! for I never will forsake thee while hie remains; and even were I to die, my spirit, I am assured, will hover near thee still.”

”*Thou!*” said she bitterly, as she snatched away her hands; ”what art thou to me?”

The young man trembled, for at these cruel words a heavy palsy seemed to fall upon his heart.

”And where is his castle, Konrad?” she demanded abruptly.

”Behold!” he replied; and, drawing back a mass of the pendant ivy and wild-roses that overhung the entrance of the vault, he displayed the beautiful valley or dell, through which the noble Clyde, so broad, blue, and crystalline, was winding between its banks of lofty wood, and overlooked by the dark façade of Bothwell’s princely stronghold.

Full on the long line of its crenelated rampart, on the strong round towers that the patriot Wallace, and ”proud Pembroke’s haughty Earl,” had built, on its shining casements and lofty keep, overtopping the summer foliage and the morning mist, shone the warm splendour of the early sun. Anna gave one fixed and fierce glance at the edifice, and then arose with tottering steps, and wildness in her air and eyes.

”Whither wouldst thou, Anna?” said Konrad imploringly, retaining her hand.

”I am going to him” —

”To Bothwell?”

”I will—I shall see him once again, though only to expire at his feet. One interview may” —

”Dear Anna,” said Konrad, who never for an instant, under all her petulance and neglect, altered his gentle and loverlike tone; ”thou forgettest that he is wedded to another—a great lady of the land—and that thou art now but as a weed, a bramble in his path, to be crushed or thrown aside.”

”Go to! Konrad—’tis but jealousy that makes thee speak thus.”

”Thou wrongest me, Lady Anna; ’tis long since jealousy died within me. Oh! *that* was an agony that could not last with life. Tarry but one hour, I implore—thou art so faint, Anna” —

”Dare you detain me, sir?”

”Go, then; and Bothwell’s boorish warders and flippant pages will drive thee like some poor wanton from his gates; and think then—when with insult and

opprobrium they are closed upon thee—what thy father, the brave old knight of Aggerhuis, who died with one hand on his sword and the other on the standard of the Lubeckers, would have felt, could he have thought that such an hour was reserved for the only daughter of that wife he loved so dearly?”

”True—true!” replied Anna, giving way to a passionate burst of tears; for the mention of her parents subdued her. ”O Mary! blessed mother of compassion, intercede for me! Inspire me with resignation and strength to endure my fate. Ah, pardon me, kind and good Konrad! for my heart is so torn by love and shame and indignation, that at times I know not what I say. From what I was in Frederick’s court, to become what I am—a poor outcast on a foreign shore—an object of scorn to the proud, and pity to the good! Oh, how frightful! Be still kind to me, Konrad—and end my misery by putting thy poniard into the heart that so cruelly deceived thee.”

Konrad was deeply moved by this passionate burst of grief; he leaned against a fragment of the ruin, and covered his face with his hands.

”Anna!” said he, after a pause; ”bethink thee that Scotland hath a queen whose goodness of heart and gentleness of spirit are revered in every land save her own?”

”True! and at her feet will I pour forth my sorrow and my tears together. As a woman she will sympathize with me, and lend a kind ear to the story of my wrongs, Thou wilt go with me, Konrad?”

He kissed her hand again, and led her to the arch of the vault, and then they paused—for at that moment the blast of a bugle, clear and ringing, ascended from the bosky dell below the ruined Priory. Then the flash of steel was seen among the foliage, and a band of between forty and fifty men-at-arms on horseback, three abreast, having two swallow-tailed pennons displayed, and with their steel caps and tall uplifted lances glittering in the morning sun, swept at full gallop round the steep knoll on which the castle stood.

For a few minutes the reflection of their passing files was seen to glitter in the mirror-like bosom of the river, as horse and rider, spear and pennon, vanished among the apple bowers and birchen glades that clothed the braes of Bothwell.

Konrad felt instinctively that they were in pursuit of him; and, with a sadness and anxiety caused only by the reflection that, if he were slain, Anna would be friendless and desolate, he led her slowly from the ruins, and, hand in hand, the forlorn pair traversed the thickets of old and gnarled oak surrounding Blantyre Priory, and reached the rough and dusty highway which was to lead them—but

how they knew not—to the court and palace of the Queen of Scotland.

CHAPTER XXII. THE COUNTESS JANE.

What was once a source of pleasure,
Now becomes the cause of pain;
Day no more displays its treasure,
Endless night o'erspreads the plain:
The powers of nature and of art
Cease to charm the wounded heart.

Sonnet by Queen Mary.

The Earl of Bothwell was more astonished than alarmed on finding his Countess insensible; but hastening forward with proper solicitude, he raised her from the ground, and the moment he did so she partially recovered.

Her deep dark eyes gave him one full, bright, sickening glance of sorrow and reproach, then she closed them again, and her head drooped over his shoulder.

Again she recovered suddenly, and, trembling in every limb, withdrew from the Earl's encircling arm, and cold, passionless, and rigid in feature as a statue, gazed steadily upon him for a moment, and, removing her wedding ring from the marriage finger, laid it on a little marble table that stood near her.

"Now, my Lord," said she, in a voice that struggled to be firm, "now, I have done with thee. Give this ring to *her* who now wears my betrothal gift, and may she be happier than I have been! Oh! Bothwell, Bothwell! if ever"—

"Woman, art thou mad?" exclaimed the astonished noble, growing pale with surprise and increasing anger.

The Countess laughed bitterly.

"Mad!" she repeated, and pressed her little hands upon her throbbing temples. A strange light blazed in her dark eyes, that were liquid and swimming, though not one of the hot salt tears that trembled in them rolled over her pallid cheek. "Yes—I am mad! ha, ha!"

A shudder crept over Bothwell on hearing that ghastly laugh, and he said—"Take up thy ring, Jane, for thy manner makes me tremble."

"Hah! doth it so? Oh, Bothwell! did I not love thee almost to adoration, I should spit upon thee! Thy ring—oh! never more shall ring of thine disgrace the hand of Lord Huntly's daughter. Where is the ring that I gave thee in exchange for *this* on the day of our betrothal, when together we knelt before the Bishop of Dunblane, and the old man blessed us both? Oh, false and faithless! dishonourable and base!"—

"Speak louder, lady!" said the Earl, whose brow darkened with suppressed passion,— "speak louder, I pray thee! Let every groom and gossiping page hear how Bothwell and his Countess can bandy hard words in their quarrels, like two tavern brawlers. What a plague have I to do with thy quips and quirks?—thy freaks and wild fancies? Thou hast found thy tongue, (a wanion upon it!) pray, endeavour to recover thy temper also. Lady—by St. Paul thy best wits have gone woolgathering!"

"Oh! why didst thou wed me, Bothwell?" she exclaimed, in a passionate burst of grief, as she threw herself upon a cushioned settle, and covered her face with her hands. The Earl was touched; he approached, and bent over her.

"Jane, Jane!" he began, in a faltering voice.

"Why didst thou take me from hearts that loved me so well?"

Scorn curled the Earl's lip at this question, for he thought it referred regretfully to Lord Sutherland, who, in her girlish days, had been an assiduous admirer of the Countess. He replied coldly—

"I doubt not there are still hearts who love thee in Strathbolgie—and *Strathnaver*, too."

"Begone!" she exclaimed, in a voice that thrilled through him; for her terrible malady was then fast stealing upon her senses and energies. "Begone to thine Anna, and leave Jane of Gordon to die! Away—begone!—dost thou hear?" And, in the childish bitterness of her passion, she spat upon him.

The Earl withdrew a pace or two; rage crimsoned his features, and he rolled his eyes about for some object to vent his fury upon.

"Oh! why didst thou teach me to love thee?" continued the Countess in her piercing voice. "What led thee to woo and to wed me?"

"*Fatality!*" replied the Earl, with a cold and haughty smile. "Fatality! O woman! knowest thou not that every action of my life has been impelled by an overruling principle, which I could neither see, nor avert, nor avoid? and I know not on what other shoals and rocks of danger and intrigue, this current of my inevitable fete may hurry me. But I feel within me a solemn presentiment that this right hand shall yet do deeds at which the boldest hearts—and my own, too—shall be startled and dismayed."

"Away from me further; for now I see thou art tainted with the cursed heresies of Calvin. Fatality! This is not the Catholic doctrine thy pious mother,

Agnes of Sinclair, instilled into thy mind. Now I no longer need to marvel at thy duplicity. Thou who art false to thy God, may well be false to me; or art thou growing mad, too? Away to Anna, and leave me!"

"Anna?"

"Yes, Anna—'tis the name thou hast often muttered in thy sleep, when, with a heart full of love, I lay waking and watching by thy side, and these evil dreams were my meed. Hence to thy Norwegian!"

"By St. Paul! this fellow, Konrad, hath been with thee! Ah, villain and traitor! beware how thou comest again within the reach of Bothwell's dagger. Ho, Hob of Ormiston!—John of Bolton!—Calder!—Paris!—ho there! What a block-head, what a jack-a-lent I have been!"

The page appeared, and too frightened to remember his fee now, trembled in every limb at the domestic storm he had been partly the means of raising.

"Has any one had access to the Countess?" asked the Earl, with a terrible frown.

"None—none, my lord, that I know aught of."

"French Paris, thou art a subtle little villain, and hadst thou not been gifted to me, like a marmozet, by the Queen, I would have cracked thy head, as thy likeness would a nut, to obtain the truth! Have the lairds of Ormiston or Bolton returned yet?"

"This moment only, my lord. They are in the hall, and in their armour yet."

"Let their stout jackmen hie to horse again, and bid them look well to girth and spur-leather; so, while I arm me, boy, send the knights hither."

While Bothwell hurriedly buckled on a suit of armour that was lying near—for, as we said elsewhere, no man could with safety venture a yard from his own door unarmed—the Countess lay on the crimson settle, with her face covered by her hands, over which her long black hair was flowing in disorder.

The clank of armed heels and steel scabbards in the antechamber, heralded the approach of the knights, and their mail flashed as the heavy arras was drawn aside, and they stood before the Earl.

"The Norwegian hath been here!" whispered the latter to Ormiston.

"How—who?"

"Konrad of Saltzberg—thou rememberest him," he added aloud; "and he hath bewitched the Countess—a French sorcerer, Bolton, anent whom I will tell thee another time. Horse and spear! Thou, Ormiston, and I, must ride, scour the woods, and slay without reservation or remede if we find him. Nay, that were too cruel, perhaps; let us capture him, at all events. Tell your people, sirs, he is a tall fellow, with a long sword, a corselet, breeches and hosen of sable sarcenet. Twenty unicorns to the finder and capturer!"

"We must breathe our steeds first," said Ormiston, as he drew the clasps and

buckles of the Earl's armour; "we have had a tough night's work with Clelland and Lauchope. They stood it stoutly, with a hundred lances and fifty archers a-side. We have had a raid on Bothwell-muir that will make a noise among the justiciary lords at Edinburgh."

"And how came these knaves to quarrel?"

"Because, at Candlemas last, one took precedence of the other in crossing Calder brig."

"A just cause and a proper for three hundred blockheads to tilt at each other's throats! And how comest thou, Hob, to lift lance in this wise feud?"

"Because I count kindred with Clelland."

"And thou, Bolton, why wentest thou with thy fifty lances?"

"Because I claim kindred with Ormiston."

"So may ye all *hang* together in the end!" said the Earl, angrily; "while I, your lord and feudal superior, want you, ye are fighting under other banners. Now, Paris, my sword and salade. Summon my grooms, and let us to horse—the fellow cannot be far off yet."

Hob of Ormiston was sheathed in a favourite suit of black armour, which he usually wore to render his sobriquet more complete; but Bothwell's particular friend and ally, Hepburn of Bolton, who was captain of his castle of Hermitage, and lieutenant of Queen Mary's Archer Guard, wore a magnificent suit of polished steel, the gorget and shoulder-plates of which were riveted with rows of gilded-headed nails. He was a young and handsome man, and his bright blue eyes sparkled with merriment and good humour under the uplifted visor of his helmet.

Both these gentlemen helped themselves, unasked, to wine, from a red vase of gilded crystal that stood on a buffet, and both laughed somewhat unceremoniously at the unseemly conjugal feud that had evidently taken place, and each made his remarks thereon with a blunt carelessness peculiar rather to the men than to the age.

"The Lady Bothwell seemeth ill at ease," said Ormiston, winking to Hepburn over his wine horn.

"Fore heaven! he must have been a marvellous sorcerer, this Konrad," laughed the young knight, showing all his teeth under a brown mustache; "and if I come within a lance length of him, he will have reason to remember Jock of Bolton for the short remainder of his days."

"Adieu, my bonnibel!" said the Earl, in a low voice, as he laid his hand caressingly on the shoulder of the countess, who never raised her drooping head.

"Adieu!" she sobbed; "and may it be for ever."

"Ah! my jo, Jean—these are severe words," said the Earl, with a faint attempt to laugh; for at times he really felt a sincere tenderness for his little wife.

"Would to God, thou false lord, that I had never met—never married thee!"

"Well, ladybird," said he, with a sudden hauteur that was almost cruel, "thou mayest thank thy kinsman, the politic Earl of Huntly, whose intrigues to procure a rich husband for his tocherless sister brought that bridal about. By our lady! I never sought thee, save in the mere spirit of pastime and gallantry, and in that spirit, Lady Jane, I own that I loved thee well enough for a time."

"A time!" reiterated the Countess.

"Yes—what more wouldest thou have, thou exacting little fairy?"

"A time!" she repeated, and bent her bright but humid eyes upon him, while pressing her white hands tightly together, "Oh, 'twas a pity that love so tender should ever have been spoiled by marriage!"

"Thou growest sarcastic," said the Earl, as he nodded to her jocosely, adjusted his helmet, and began to whistle "*My Jollie Lemane*"—then after a time, he added, "we were never quite suited for each other, my bonnibel. Thou wert too exacting—I too gay."

The poor young Countess wrung her hands, and uttered that low laugh which thrilled through Bothwell's heart. His countenance changed; he drew back, and regarded her anxiously through his closed visor.

"Thou makest a devil of a fuss about this escapade, Lady Bothwell!" said Hob of Ormiston, in his deep bass voice; he had been intently polishing his cuirass with the lining of his gauntlet, and endeavouring to repress his disdain for the Earl's quietness, this fierce baron being in his own household despotic and terrible as a Tartar king or a Bedouin chief, "Why should not thy husband, the Earl, have a gay lemane as well as the godly Arran, the pious Morton, and other nobles, who hold nathless a fair repute in kirk and state?"

"True," said Hepburn, laughing heartily at this coarse remark, "even Master Knox, too! Is there not a story abroad in the Luckenbooths, of his having been found gamboling with a wight-wapping lass in a covered killogie?"[*]

[*] See Life of Knox.

"Mother Mary!" exclaimed the Countess wildly, as she rose to her full height, and turned her eyes of fire upon the speaker; "have I fallen so low, that I have become the sport of ruffians such as you? Begone from my bower ere I die! Is this a place, Lord Earl, for thy cut-throats and swashbucklers to bully and swagger in?"

Black Ormiston uttered a loud laugh.

"Sweet Madam," began Hepburn—

"And thou, too, John of Bolton; begone, for an officious fool!"

"By St. Paul!" said the Earl angrily, "when thou insultest my friends thus, the atmosphere of the house must be too hot to suit me. Paris—ho! attend to thy mistress; and now, sirs, to horse and away, for by the honour of Hepburn, the rascally Norseman who hath brought all this mischief about, shall dree his reward ere the sun goes down."

As they descended to the castle-yard, a wild hyena-like cry came from the Countess's bower, but instead of pausing they hastened their steps.

Horribly it rang in the hollow of Bothwell's helmet, and by it he knew that what he had dreaded was now come to pass—

That his Countess was mad!

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE PURSUIT.

The drawbridge falls, they hurry out—
 Clatters each plank and swinging chain,
 At, dashing o'er, the jovial route
 Urge the shy steed, and slack rein.
Scott.

The morning sun rose brightly upon the windings of the azure Clyde, and on the green woodlands whose foliage was reflected on its surface, as Bothwell and his two friends, at the head of about fifty jackmen, mounted on strong and fleet horses, of border training, and armed with steel caps, shirts of mail, two-handed swords and long lances, dashed at full gallop from the archway of the castle, rumbled over the sounding drawbridge, and descending from the height through the barbican gate, plunged into the bosky coppice below, where their bright armour and weapons were seen flashing and glinting among the green foliage, as they spurred towards the bridge and village of Bothwell.

"We must have this Norwegian either killed or captured," said Bothwell emphatically to Ormiston, as they galloped at the head of their train. "To have him at large with such a story on his tongue, would be submitting to my own destruction."

"True, my lord!" replied the unscrupulous retainer; "suppose he fell in the

way of Moray or of Morton—what a notable discovery! Thou sayest aright; to leave him at liberty on Scottish ground, with this secret in his fool's noddle, would but serve to ruin thee at Holyrood, and injure all who follow thy banner."

"He has, as we know, wrongs to avenge; and men, in these brisk days of ours, are not wont to follow those precepts of scripture, which Knox and Wishart have dinned into our ears—by turning one cheek to the foe who smites us on the other—and these wrongs may lead him straight to the ears of Huntly. Fool that I was, when he stood on my own hall floor"—

"Where was then thy dagger?" asked black Hob, with a ferocious look.

"May God forbid—and forefend its use in such a place!" replied the Earl. "Such a trick were worse than that old Douglas played the Knight of Bombie at the Castle of Threave, and a deed deserving such meed as I pray Heaven may mete to me, in that hour when I fall so far in guilt. Nay—nay! under my own roof to take the life of a trusting guest! Go to, Ormiston! thou art stark mad, or stark bad!"

"Cock and pie! what a fuss thou makest! Then thou hadst the dungeon, and it might have spared us this ride, which to say truth, after our last night's hard work in plate and mail, with lance and maul, I could very well have spared. I have been cheated of breakfast, too! But mayhap the warder at the bridge hath a bowie of porridge, or a slice of beef and a can of ale, to spare."

"Hob, do thou take the bridle-path that leads to the tower of Clelland; after the drubbing thou gavest him overnight, the laird will not likely molest thy penon. Scatter twenty lances to prick among the woodlands. Bolton, thou wilt ride with ten men by Calderside, and do likewise; while I cross the Clyde, and search by Blantyre Priory. *Keep tryste* on Bothwell-muir! So now adieu, sirs!—Forward, my stout prickers, and remember, my merry men all—twenty unicorns of gold to the finder of this knave! He is a tall fellow, with a fair curly head, a corselet, and black hosen."

Dividing into three, at a wave of his hand the horsemen separated, and galloped off on their different routes.

Leaving the Knight of Ormiston and the Lieutenant of the Archers to pursue their various roads, which happily they did without success, we will accompany the Earl, who, with twenty prickers, or light-armed horsemen, rode towards the bridge of Bothwell, pursuing the ancient Roman way.

It was a glorious summer morning; the air was balmy, and all nature wore its brightest hue; the green fields and the waving foliage were rich and verdant, and glittered in the silver dew, which the sun was exhaling in gauzy mist. Bothwell, full of anxiety to recapture Konrad, and thereafter to find some means necessary for stifling the dangerous secret he possessed, rode furiously on, despatching his riders by couples along the various narrow paths that led from the ancient

way, to the different baronial towers and hamlets whose smoke was seen curling from the woods on each side.

With their mossy roofs and clay-built lums, the latter were generally nestling in the wooded dingles which were overlooked by the battlemented peels, that stood in bold outline against the sky, with their red walls glancing, and dark smoke ascending in the sunshine. From their summits many a watchman looked sharply and keenly at the distant horsemen as they rode through the thickets below, appearing at times on the dusty highway, or spurring along the steep Hill-sides, with their lance-heads flashing like silver stars among the bright green leaves.

With all the impetuosity of his nature, Bothwell rode fast and furiously on, and till he reached the muir never drew bridle, save once, to cross himself and mutter an *ave* on passing one of those little chapels or roadside shrines, which are still so common in Spain and Italy, and which the pious spirit of the olden time erected by the wayside to remind the passers of their religious duties. It was rudely formed, and had been erected by his pious ancestress, Agnes Stewart of Buchan, that the wayfarer might say one prayer for the soul of her husband, Adam Earl of Bothwell, who had fallen fighting for Scotland on Flodden field.

And here the Earl, even in his path of vengeance, paused to offer up a prayer.

The little chapel was formed by a single gothic arch, containing an altar, a niche, and pedestal graven with the words, *Saint Mary, pray for me!* but the hands of the Reformers had been there; the shrine was empty, the altar mutilated, the weeds and wallflower were growing in luxuriance about it, and the fountain, that once had flowed from a carved face into a stone basin below, in consequence of the wanton and fanatical destruction of the latter, was running across the roadway, where it had long since made for itself a little channel.

The extensive muir of Bothwell, which is now so beautiful in its modern state of cultivation and fertility, was then a wide sequestered waste of purple heather, dotted by grey rocks, tufts of golden broom, and masses of dark green whin.

Traces of that recent feudal conflict, in which Ormiston and Bolton had been handling their swords, were met at every rood of the way, by the Earl and six horsemen who now accompanied him. Broken swords and splintered lances were lying by the roadside, and parties of peasantry were passed, bearing away the dead and wounded in grey plaids, on biers of pikes or branches of trees; the women tearing their hair and lamenting aloud; the men, with their bonnets drawn over their knitted brows, brooding on that future vengeance which, in those days of feudalism, and of bold hearts and ready hands, was never far distant.

A ride of a mile and a half from his castle gate brought the Earl to the village of Bothwell, which bordered the ancient way known as the Watling street. Then it was but a little thatched hamlet, clustered with gable ends and clay lums, near the venerable church founded by Archibald the Grim, Lord of Galloway. Beyond, lay the mains and groves of Bothwellhaugh, possessed by a lesser baron of the house of Hamilton.

Here the vassal villagers came crowding, bonnet in hand, around the Earl, and in courtesy he was compelled to touch his helmet and rein up; while the parish beadle, after tinkling the skelloche bell, issued, according to an ancient custom now obsolete in Scotland, the following burial proclamation:—

”All brethren and sisters! I let you to wit, there is a brother, Ninian Liddal of the Nettlestanebrae, hath been slain by the Laird of Lauchope’s riders, in a raid yestreen, on Bothwell-muir, as was the will and pleasure of Almighty God (lifting his bonnet). The burying will be at twelve o’clock the morn, and the corpse is streekit and kistit at the change-house, up by the townhead!”

And he departed, ringing his bell in the same slow fashion with which he usually preceded funerals, to the collegiate kirk of Bothwell.

On the purple muirland many unclaimed bodies were lying stark and rigid—

”With the dew on their brow, and the rust on their mail;”

while the black corbies and ravenous gleds were wheeling in circles above them, in that blue sky on which the eyes of the dead had closed for ever.

”Gramercy!” said Hay of Tallo, a follower of the Earl, as a man, whose beard was white as snow, and whose loose grey gown was torn in many places, hurried out of their path; ”is not yonder fellow some mass-monging priest?”

”Gif I thought so,” growled a jackman, lifting his lance, ”I would cleave his croon! He hath been searching the scrips and pouches of the dead.”

”Shriving the dying, more likely, thou knave!” said the Earl; ”’tis Father Tarbet, a poor monk of a Reformed monastery, and I dare thee to offer him insult under peril of pit and gyves.”

A powerful horse, bearing its steel-bowed military saddle, accoutred with caliver and jedwood axe, lay rolling in the last agonies of death, with a broken lance thrust far into its broad bosom.

Such sights and incidents were rather too common in that age to attract much attention; so the Earl and his followers, without even remarking them, rode on to the end of the extensive muir, and there wound their horns to call together such of their companions as might be within hearing.

One by one the wearied riders came in, but brought no tidings of the fugi-

tive.

Every sheeptrack and pathway through all the extensive barony had been searched—by Woodhall and Sweethope; by the old tower of Lauchope on its steep rock; by the banks of the Calder that flowed beneath it, and in that great cavern where Wight Wallace found a refuge in the days of old; by Bothwell brig, and muir, and haugh; by the old gothic kirk and the Prebend's Yards; but without finding a trace of Konrad.

Hob of Ormiston, and Hepburn, the captain of Hermitage, came in last, with the same tidings; and, with uplifted hand, the wrathful Earl made a vow of vengeance upon the fugitive.

The armour of the whole troop was covered with summer dust, and their horses were jaded by hard and devious riding.

"And now, my lord," said Hepburn of Bolton, "whither wend we?"

"To court—to court! As warden of the three marches, I have received a summons to attend the queen, who holds her court at Linlithgow; and I will return to Bothwell no more—not to night at least," added the Earl; "are all our knaves come up?"

"Every lance, my lord," replied young Hepburn, counting the files with his spear.

"Then set forward, sirs—and, John of Bolton, do thou lead the van," and at the head of his numerous train the Earl departed from Clydesdale.

A band of so many armed retainers, attending a great baron to court, excited no surprise in that age. A feudal landholder's influence being exactly measured, not by the number of merks Scots he drew per annum, but by the number of men he could lead to battle on behalf of the King or himself. Godscroft informs us that the great Earl of Douglas, who was slain at Edinburgh about a hundred years before the days of Bothwell, never rode abroad with less than two thousand mailed horsemen under his banner.

CHAPTER XXIV. MARY QUEEN OF SCOTS.

O king! in an evil day was I beloved by you,
Since that, love has cost me dear!

Amadis de Gaul.

It was in the month of June, and in the meridian of one of June's most beautiful days. The sun shone joyously on old Linlithgow's wooded loch and magnificent palace; on its carved towers, the clustered gables of its grand façade; and on the belfry of St. Michael, the friend of strangers; on the venerable oaks and graceful ashes that fringed its azure lake, where the snow-white swans were floating in crystal and light; on the steep and narrow streets of the town, with their high-peaked roofs and crow-stepped gables, encrusted with coats-of-arms and quaint devices—on all its varied scenery, fell the bright radiance of a cloudless noon.

The sky was of the purest blue, and the lake gleamed like a vast mirror of polished crystal, reflecting in its depths the banks of emerald green, the beautiful palace, with all its mullioned windows and long perspective of crenelated battlements, the summer woodlands, and the floating swans.

Though the poverty and gloom that spread over Scotland with the Reformation, had dimmed the splendour of her court, and depressed the spirit of her people, turning their gaiety into stolid gravity and moroseness, the palace then bore an aspect very different from that it bears to-day.

In many a hall and chamber, where now the long reedy grass, the tenacious ivy, the scented wallflower, and the wild docken, flourish in luxuriance, the well-brushed tapestries of silk and cloth of gold hung on tenterhooks of polished steel; and casements of stained glass, rich with the armorial bearings of Bourbon, Lorraine, Guise, England, and other alliances of the house of Stuart, filled up those mullioned windows, where now the owl and the ravenous gled build their nests; for now the velvet moss and the long grass, are growing green on the floors of Queen Margaret's crumbling bower, and Mary's roofless birthplace—in the stately hall where Scotland's peers, in parliament assembled, gave laws to her lawless clans; and the beautiful chapel, where, for many an age, the most solemn sacraments of the first church were dispensed to her gallant rulers.

In the June of the year of God 1567, its aspect was the same as when King James, of gallant memory, had left it for Flodden field.

The leaves were as green and the grass as verdant, the lake was as blue and the sun as bright, as they are to-day, and may be a thousand years after the last stone of Linlithgow shall have fallen from its place.

Its casements were glittering in the sunshine; the royal standard of Scotland, the yellow banner with the lion gules, was waving from one of the great towers; steel was flashing on parapet and tourelle, as the polished basinet and pikeheads of the soldiers of the guard appeared at intervals on the stone bartisans, from which a number of those little brass cannon known as drakes and moyennes peeped between the massive embrasures. And in that deep archway, which is guarded by two strong octagon towers, perforated with numerous arrow-holes, and surmounted by a gorgeous battlement, representing in four carved com-

partments the orders of knighthood borne by James V.—the Saint Andrew, Saint George, Saint Michael, and the Golden Fleece—were crowding a group of liverymen and swashbucklers in half-armour, with sword, target, and dagger, their arrogance and pride of clanship being displayed by their bearing and ferocity of aspect, their cocked bonnets, and embroidered sleeve-badges. Mingling with them were gaily attired pages, grooms, falconers, and archers of the queen's body guard, clad in green gaberdines with gorgets and caps of steel, each bearing his unstrung bow, and having a sheaf of arrows bristling in the same belt that sustained his short cross-hilted sword and long double-edged dagger.

The bustle about the palace gates was unusual, for the Lords of the Privy Council were assembled in the Parliament hall, and Mary was seated on the throne.

Into that magnificent apartment, which measures a hundred feet in length by thirty in breadth, and which had a roof nearly forty feet in height, light was admitted by two rows of arched windows, between each of which projected a double tier of beautiful corbels, the lower upholding a line of statues—the upper sustaining the ceiling of elaborate oak, which sprung away aloft into intricacy and brown obscurity. A vast fireplace yawned at one end; it was supported by four gothic columns, clustered and capitalled with the richest embossage.

The young King Henry, a tall and handsome, but pale and beardless youth, whose effeminate aspect contrasted strongly with those of the mustached and sunburned lords of the council, sat on the Queen's left hand. His face was a perfect oval, and his eyes were dark like his hair, which was short and curly. His attire was fashioned in the extreme of gorgeous extravagance; the sleeves and breast of his blue satin doublet being loaded with lace and precious stones. He had nothing military about him save a small walking-sword, for arms were not King Henry's forte, which was quite enough to make the Scots heartily despise him.

A long career of debauchery, drinking, and excess, had ruined his constitution, and now a pallor like unto that of death was visible in his hollow cheek and lustreless eye; and as he lounged back in his cushioned seat, much more interested in flirting with the maids of honour than listening to affairs debated by the council, he had all the aspect of the prematurely worn out man of pleasure—the satiated *roué*—the *ennuyée*, whom the slightest exertion of mind or body was sufficient to bore to death. Mary, disgusted by his daily excesses, which shocked her delicacy and wounded her pride, had long since ceased to love him, and had learned to deplore that alliance which youthful inclination, and the ardour of her impulsive nature, rather than the dictates of prudence, had led her to form; when from among all her suitors, many of whom were the sons of kings—the Archduke of Austria, Don Carlos of Spain, and others—she, the most beautiful woman in

Europe, she, whose genius equalled her beauty, and whose piety equalled her genius, preferred the worthless heir of the exiled house of Lennox! This ill-fated marriage began the long series of those disastrous events which ended in the towers of Fotheringay; but who then, when Mary was seated on the throne of a hundred kings, in the palace of her fathers, with the crown of Bruce, the sceptre of James V., and the consecrated sword of Pope Julius before her, could have foreseen that dark hour of humiliation and of death?

The beauty of Darnley's person was his only merit. He was alike destitute of honour, religion, and morality—in all, the reverse of Mary. Vain and imperious, fierce, jealous, and capricious, his temper soon excited disgust in her sensitive mind; and the ruthless murder of her poor Italian secretary, had converted her rash and youthful love into contempt and hatred—for such at times is the transition; such is the fickleness of the human heart; and "the vivacity of Mary's spirit," says an historian, "not being sufficiently tempered with sound judgment, and the warmth of her heart, which was not at all times under the restraint of discretion, betrayed her into errors."

At this very time, when the council were most intent upon some knotty points of state policy, the king, oblivious of all, or affecting to be so, was alternately playing with the gold tassels of his embroidered mantle, and coquetting with Mariette Hubert, a young French lady, by conversing in the symbolical language of flowers; for each had taken a bouquet from a row of Venetian vases that decorated the hall windows, and filled its vast space with delightful perfume. When addressed by the Queen, he replied with a hauteur and brevity that she could ill brook; for, although he had acquired the title of King, and been admitted to share her councils, he was dissatisfied that she did not invest him with greater power, and content herself with the rank of mere queen-consort. To this measure, Mary, aware of his utter incapacity for governing, and the aversion of the fierce noblesse, wisely declined an assent; and Darnley's haughty spirit never forgave the affront, which he attributed to the influence of Rizzio; hence his leaguings with Moray and Morton; and hence the murder in the queen's chamber at Holyrood, fifteen months before.

A succession of strong flakes of light fell through the lozenged casements of the stained windows on one side of the hall, and threw their prismatic hues on the long table which was covered with green cloth, and on the bearded peers who sat around it. All were richly attired in satin and velvet, slashed and furred with miniver; all were well armed, some having corselets and plate sleeves, others pyne doublets, calculated to resist the points and edges of the best-tempered weapons.

There were present the Earl of Morton, lord high chancellor, whose fine countenance compensated in some degree for the shortness of his stature. His

face was dark and swarthy; his beard long and sweeping, but its blackness was now beginning to be touched with grey; his eyes, quick and cunning, keen and penetrating, watched every visage, but chiefly that of his colleague and compatriot—his partner in many a deep intrigue and desperate counter-plot, James Stuart, the still more famous Earl of Moray, who seemed the living image of his handsome father, James V. He had the same dark oval face, so melancholy and dignified in its contour, the same short beard and close shorn chin, the same thick brown mustache, and deep dark hazel-eye. But under that calm exterior were a heart and mind unequalled in ambition, and unsurpassed in statecraft—a wisdom that bordered on cunning—a caution that (at times) bordered on cowardice—a bravery that bordered on rashness; yet never for an instant did he lose sight of that object which every secret energy had for years been bent to attain, and for which his life was staked—POWER!

And there were Cassilis, Lindsay, and Olencairn, dark-browed, savage, brutal, and illiterate as any barons that ever figured in the pages of romance—each the beau-ideal of a feudal tyrant; morose by fanaticism, and inflated by power; for a few short years had seen them and their compatriots gorged to their full with the plundered temporalities of the fallen hierarchy. And there, too, were the venerable Le Crocq, the good and wise ambassador of Charles IX., wearing the silver shells of St. Michael glittering on his plain doublet of black taffeta; and Monsieur le Marquis d'Elboeuff, brother of the late Queen Regent, Mary of Lorraine.

This gay and thoughtless, but handsome noble, was dressed in the extremity of Parisian foppery. His doublet was cloth of gold; his breeches, of crimson velvet, reached to within six inches of his knees, from whence he had long hose of white silk. He wore a very high ruff, with the Golden Fleece of Burgundy, and the Thistle of the order of Bourbon under it. A yellow satin mantle dangled from his left shoulder; his gloves were perfumed to excess; his hat was conical and broad-brimmed, but he carried it tunder his left arm. His short Parmese poniard and long Toledo sword were covered with precious stones, and in imitation of the great English beau, the effeminate Earl of Pembroke, in addition to ear-rings, he had dangling at his right ear a flower—presumed to be the gift of some enamoured belle—while from the left depended a long love-lock.

Contrasting strongly with all this frippery, in the dignity of his aspect and bearing, and the plainness of his dress, Sir William Maitland of Lethington, secretary of the kingdom—the Scottish Machiavel, the greatest and most vacillating statesman Scotland ever produced—stood at the foot of the green table.

Attired in simple black velvet, but having a long stomacher dotted with seed pearls, an enormous fardingale, and a little ruff round her delicate neck, Mary, having little other adornment than those which nature had given her, sat under

the purple canopy of her grandsire, James IV. From a brow that bore the impress of intelligence and candour, her auburn hair that gleamed like gold (when, from a lofty casement above, the sunlight fell upon it), was drawn back from her snowy temples, and, by being puffed out on each side, while her little velvet cap was depressed in the centre by a gold drop, increased the dignified contour of a face that was never beheld without exciting admiration and love. The steady brilliance of her splendid dark eyes, the form of her nostrils, together with the exquisite curve of her short upper lip, and dimpled chin, all expressed in an eminent degree the various emotions of her acute and sensitive mind; while they were ever full of a sweetness and beauty that were no less singular in their character than remarkable in their degree.

Every turn of her beautiful head, every motion of her rounded arms and dimpled hands, were full of grace; so that even "dark Morton," the ferocious Lindesay, and subtle Moray, while at that moment plotting her downfall and destruction, could not but in their secret souls acknowledge how noble and bewitching was that being whom they were seeking to hurl from the Scottish throne.

She carried at her waist a little amber rosary, or Saviour's chaplet, of thirty-three beads, being one for each year that Christ dwelt among us on earth; and, true to that religion which formed her last and best consolation in that terrible hour which none could then foresee, she wore on her bosom a little crucifix of gold.

Behind her state chair were several ladies of the court, wearing enormous fardingales and high ruffs, and some of them—particularly the Countesses of Argyle and Huntly—having their heads loaded with ornaments.

The captain of the archer guard, Arthur Erskine, a handsome young cadet of the house of Mar, clad in half armour of the richest steel, and having his helmet borne by a page, stood near the doorway of the hall, about thirty yards from the green table, and quite beyond earshot. Close by the door stood his lieutenant, the knight of Bolton, leaning on his drawn sword, and dividing his time between watching the ladies of the court, tracing diagrams on the oak floor with the point of his weapon, and complacently viewing his own handsome person in a large mirror that hung opposite.

Mary's pleading eyes were full of tears; for the rudeness and rebellious spirit of her council stung her pride and wounded her delicacy.

The principal matter in debate had been the muster of troops and commissioning of a noble to lead them to the borders, where a court of justice was to be held for the repression of turbulence among the moss-trooping lairds of Teviotdale; but the proceedings had been constantly interrupted by the boisterous Patrick Lord Lindesay, and William Earl of Glencairn, who in harsh and scandalous terms urged upon their compeers the necessity of enforcing stringent laws

against the church of Rome, as a just meed for its tyranny in the noon of pride and power.

"Yea, my lords," continued the latter, pursuing with kindling eyes and furious gesture the train of his address; "methinks I need not inform you, that there have been divers and sundry acts of estate passed in the days of the James's, her majesty's royal predecessors, yea, and in our sovereign lady's time, quhilk aggreith not with the holy word of God—acts tending to the maintenance and upholding of idolatory and the mass, the superstition and the mummery of the Church of Rome"—

"*Ma chere, Madame!*" began the Marquis d'Elboeuff, rising with his hand on his sword, and his kindling eyes fixed on Mary.

"My lord—my lord!" exclaimed Lethington and the politic Moray together, on seeing that the queen's eyes were flashing through their tears.

"He speaketh like a stout man and true," said old Lord Lindesay, starting up on the opposite side of the table, and leaning on his long and well-rusted Flemish sword. "He sayeth the truth, quhilk I will maintain against all gainsayers with this gude whinger, body for body, on foot or on horseback. For what, my lords, was the mumming of the mass but ane superstition devisit of auld by the devil, and his godson, the Bishop of Rome—callit the Paip; and I swear, and avow, and aver, that no man should, or shall, be permitted to uphold him or them, in thought, or word, or deed, from this time forward, within the realm and isles of Scotland, under pain of proscription, banishment, barratrie—yea, and death!"

"Stout Lindesay, thou sayest well!" responded Glencairn; "and a bright day was it for Scotland, when the bellygods and shavelings of Rome lay grovelling in the dust of their gilded altars and painted blasphemies."

"Gramercy! my lords," said Mary, sarcastically. "I think that few men should be more merciful to our fallen church than you. Fie! Lord Lindsay: is not thy daughter Margaret wedded to David Beatoun of Creich, a son of the great cardinal who was the very emperor of those Roman bellygods; while thou, my Lord Glencairn, brookest all the broad lands and rich livings, chapelries and altarages, of the noble Abbey of Kilwinning?"

Lindesay's swarthy cheek glowed brick-red, and Glencairn's brow was darkened by a deeper frown.

"*Ah, ma bonne!*" said Mary, turning to her sister, the Countess of Argyle, and whispering something in French, at which they both laughed; while the two pillars of the Reformation, who knew as much of French as they did of Choctaw or Cherokee, exchanged mutual glances expressive of unutterable ferocity. Moray and Morton also exchanged two of those deep smiles which their faces always assumed when any thing like a storm was brewing at the council board.

"My lords," said the poor Queen, in her most persuasive voice, "let us again

return to the matter in debate, which is of more importance than framing acts for the further oppression of a fallen church, the prosecution of sorcerers, or enforcing sombre attire and scanty fere upon our poor lieges.”

”Matter, madam!” growled Lindsay.

”I mean the bearing of the royal banner to the borders. Lord Lindsay, what sayest thou to assume the baton?”

”I thank your Majesty, but may the devil break my bones gif I will.”

”Wherefore, thou silly carle?” asked Morton in a low voice.

”Because the papists of the house of Lennox are ranked under the Queen’s banner,” replied the rough baron, bluntly.

”By the holy Paul!” said Darnley yawning; ”but I deem thee Lindsay the most obdurate, as well as insolent heretic in all broad Scotland.”

Lindsay was almost choking with passion at what he deemed the petulance of a pampered boy; but the storm that might have broken forth was allayed for a time, by the Queen saying hastily to the secretary of state—

”Sir William Maitland, will it please you to read the last letter of *ma bonne soeur* Elizabeth, concerning the broken men of Tarras moss and Teviotdale?”

That most subtle of secretaries bowed very low, and while the lords of the council courteously arose to hear the Queen of England’s letter read, he carefully unfastened the white ribbon and red seal bearing three lions, and unfolded the missive of the cold and crafty Tudor.

He read as follows:—

”Right high, right excellent, and mighty Princess, our dearest good-sister and cousin, to you be our most hearty commendations.

”It is well known unto you, that the inobedience of certain of your subjects, and their turbulent inroads and forays with displayed banners and uplifted lances among our baronies and beeves of Northumberland, have bred great misery to our people, who desire to live in all tender love with the Scots on the north side of the debatable land. We may mention particularly the prickers of John Elliot of Park, Kerr of Cessford, Sir Walter Scott of Buccleuch, and other notorious thieves and outlaws; and we lament that, for the wrongs sustained by our lieges at their hands, this our loving message may be followed by the garter king with our glove, if peace be not kept, and restitution made; and so, right high, right excellent, and mighty Princess, our dearest good-sister and cousin, we pray God to send you a long and prosperous reign.

”ELIZABETH R.

”Done at our castle of Greenwich, the 1st May, 1567.”

"God send that glove comes soon!" said Glencairn with stern joy; "my father fell at Pinkie, and my grandsire fell at Flodden, so I have a debt of blood as yet unsettled with those Englishmen."

"Our dearest sister's letter contains a most unsisterly threat," said the Queen with one of her arch smiles; "but this, her reiterated remonstrance, deserves attention. Sir Walter Scott of Branxholme and Buccleuch"—

"I will be his surety, please your grace," said Morton, whose niece Buccleuch had married; "I will be warranty to the amount of ten thousand merks."

"And I for my kinsman Cessford in the same," added Lord Crichton of Sanquhar, a tall and fair-haired peer, wearing a shirt of mail and velvet mantle.

"Ten thousand merks—um—um—that the lairds of Cessford and Buccleuch will underly the law," muttered the secretary, making a minute in his books.

"Poor John of Park! and will no one become surety for thee?" said the Queen.

"Nay, your grace," replied Sir William Maitland; "no one would be so foolhardy with his merks. He is the strongest thief between the Lammermuir and the Rere cross of Stanmore; he never rides abroad with less than four hundred lances in his train, all broken men, and masterful thieves."

"All daredevils!" said the Earl of Moray; "troopers with scarred visages, and hearts as tough and impenetrable as their armour. Ah! Park loves the bright moonlight well."

"So do I," added the Queen, artlessly; "how droll!"

"But not in John o' Park's fashion, sweet sister," replied the swarthy Earl. "He loves it as a lamp to light him into Northumberland, when he thinks little of riding some forty miles between midnight and cockcrow—laying a dozen of villages in ashes, sacking as many peelhouses, overthrowing a score of homesteads, and so returning on the spur with all the cattle of a countryside, goaded by the lances of his troopers, who usually have them all safe in Ettrick wood or Tarras moss, long ere the old bandsmen of Berwick, or the riders of the English wardenrie, are in their stirrups."

"We will bridle his vivacity," said Mary. "Earl Marischal, how many of our vassals have repaired to the royal standard, in conformity to the proclamation?"

"Three thousand, please your majesty," replied the veteran head of the house of Keith.

"Then who will lead them to the field?"

There was a half simultaneous motion among the peers—but the Reformed lords drew back, because the Catholic vassals of Lennox were said to be under the royal standard; and the Catholic lords exhibited a similar coldness from a dislike to lead the Protestant vassals of the crown. There was a pause, and all turned towards King Henry as the most fitting person to uphold the authority of

his royal consort; but he was still engaged coquetting with Mariette Hubert, and a blush of shame and anger crossed the cheek of Mary.

At that moment the great chamberlain, John Lord Fleming, raised his wand, and cried with a loud voice—

”Place for the noble lord, James Earl of Bothwell, Lord of Hailes, Crichton, and Dirleton!” and the lieutenant of the Royal Archers hastily drew aside the tapestry concealing the doorway of the hall.

END OF VOLUME FIRST.

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3) ***

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